

As i do thee 5





THE FIRST SKETCH

I outline you
in memory's mirror,
a frame of rare and intricate design.
You stand unguarded
as only you are for me,
the strain of sand and logic
smoothed from your brow
where Vulcan passions twist
with human needs for love.
I long to touch
my trembling fingers
to the strength of you,
taste the secrets,
become an intimate part of
your red-scented cabin.
I wish to give
my soul into your keeping,
everything I own
if, in loving,
I do not shatter you,
Vulcan, child of logic,
the perfect form of dream.

Natasha Solten

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105

AS I DO THEE 5

*"Give me that man that is not passion's slave,
and I will carry him in my heart's core,
ay, in my heart of heart,
as I do thee."*

HAMLET



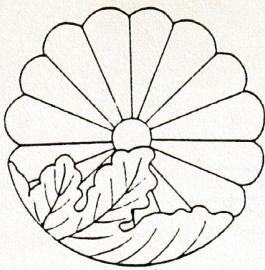
*This zine is dedicated to
the spirit of
'IDIC':
may we continue to combine
in peace.....*



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Back Cover.....	Ann Mara Crouch

EDITOR: Some person who keeps showing up at my door asking to use my typewriter....

TYPISTS: Some person who keeps showing up at my door asking to use my typewriter.... and Jenny Starr.

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ALL STORY BORDERS AND MISCELLANEOUS THINGAMABOBS AND DOO-HICKIES: Chiya

MORAL SUPPORT: See the Editorial

FROM THE EDITORIAL WASTELAND....

As you can see, AIDT #5 is not a novel by Dovya Blacque. Dovya didn't get off her ass to write her novel this summer. I kept her too busy going to conventions with me. We'll see what winter will do for her -- and will keep all available appendages crossed!

What AIDT #5 is is a nice combination of different types of stories, quite a few of which present an unusual or different interpretation of Spock. I didn't solicit 'strange Spock' stories, they just found their way here...and I'm glad they did. I hope you find this issue as pleasing as I do. And, as usual, I'm interested in hearing your opinions of the contents of the zine.

As I've traveled around the country to various conventions, I've found a strange occurrence. There are people out there, mostly pro-dealers, who are trying to sell MKASHEF Enterprises publications, as well as other presses' work, at outrageous prices. I'm talking \$30.00 for AIDT #4...which, like all of my publications, is still in print. #4 sells, from me, for \$17.00. I do not condone these people doing this nor is it done with my approval or foreknowledge. The only authorized dealer of my publications (other than individuals selling their own copies, etc.) is DATAZINE. I don't like seeing anyone cheated, so be aware that there are individuals out there trying to pull the proverbial wool over your eyes.

On to better things....

As I've said, I've been all over the country this summer to places like Houston, St. Louis, Baltimore, and even more ~~bazaar~~^e places like Los Angeles and San Francisco! It's been an incredible summer. I've met a lot of you and hope to continue doing so. It's nice to have faces to put with all those so-familiar names.

I need to thank some special people this time around:

Ann Crouch for making St. Louis bearable, even enjoyable, in spite of everything! It was great to finally meet you. And Audrey and Karen and Jennifer and Merle and Carol F. and Susan J. and Jessica and C.J. for making clear that the difference between "West Coast" and "East Coast" is only a matter of spelling. And those debauched crones up in San Francisco: Noel and Pat and Gayle and the rest of you. Not to mention the debauched crones down here: Della, Wendy and Robin; you keep me appropriately insane, a necessary state of mind for any zine editor! And, especially, Karma and Sadness for being small and warm and fuzzy and grey...(thanks for giving me the two that aren't defective, Della!). And this wonderful IBM Quietwriter 7 with Sepllcehck! (I'll be hearing little 'beeps' in my sleep for the rest of my life!)

Anyway, AIDT #6 is now accepting submissions of fiction, poetry and art for a Dec. 10, 1986 deadline. As usual, no undue violence, mayhem, torture, slavery or death, please! And remember to send the appropriate size SASE...or else!

SHADES OF GREY #2 and CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT (an adult vampire zine!) are also looking for work. SASE for more info on one or both.

So, let me hear from you: your reactions to AIDT #5, your submissions for #6 (which don't have to be for the contest -- see the end of the zine), whatever.

What I've seen and heard of STAR TREK IV looks extremely intriguing...I hope I'm right.

May all our..."voyages home" be sweet! (Sorry about that!)

In IDIC,

THE WASTED EDITOR....



Manufacturer's suggested retail price: \$15.00 (see above for the reason for this)



FEAR OF FALLING

I look at you with
the same fear of falling,
dizzy like a man
rolling toward death.

I have but one wish:
You stand beside me,
arms ready to catch
me from my black path.

Now I cannot fall,
breathe or move,
die or live.
Here, I am born.

Somewhere from hills
of live stars
you stand, shaking
gold dust from your back.

Will you come
to claim love or
verify that
I am insane?

I watch you offer the
chill of space, the
warmth of light
gathered in your palm.

You teach me how
to touch a sun,
how to fall, how
to admit love.

NATASHA SOLTEN



TWIX'T NIGHT & 'MORROW

Robin Hood

"It's been two weeks now, Spock. Your father's working on getting our asses -- or rather, my ass -- out of hot water. I know we've been busy. Hell, you haven't had two free hours to rub together what with the healers and such, but does your mother have anything planned for this evening...?" I was hoping and holding my breath that he would take me up on my rather blurted proposal.

Spock nodded slowly. "You are correct, we have not spent much time together." He paused. "My mother has no special plans for this evening. I presume by your rather colorful language, that you have something in mind?"

Look at his face. He's standing there, his hand on the stone balustrade, doesn't look much different than before, not really. Oh, I suppose he looks a little older, but that's not surprising, that planet almost got him. Genesis. Brrrrr. Even now that word turns my stomach, but we're here now and, sooner or later, my heart'll stop pounding -- if I live long enough. Oh, crap. I'm standing here, looking up at him. My mouth is probably hanging open. He's waiting for me to finish my thought.

"Ah...." I coughed to cover my wool-gathering. "Could we have some time after dinner...together?"

"Certainly," he acquiesced at once. "Shall we meet at 21:00?"

"Sure," I said happily. "Where?"

"In the garden?" he suggested. "The evening will be cool and much more conducive to your enjoyment."

"Great! I'll look forward to it."

The rest of the day blurred by me in a rush, even with the interminable talking -- how Vulcans love their discussions -- until I found myself standing



on the smooth stone steps at the entrance to the garden. It's so cool here, especially after the dusty day I've had. There's a water scent in the air. The breeze feels like a thousand caressing fingers brushing over my face, through my hair. A deep breath draws into my lungs. Vulcan is already buried in my heart. This world is so alien, yet I feel so at home. Their quiet love and respect surrounds me, offering support.

He's out there in the darkness waiting for me. Spock! The terror in the center of my chest has almost dissipated with the warmth his name flowers in my mind. Spock. When he was gone! Dead. Say it, Kirk: dead. Torn from you as an arm from a shoulder, leaving a ripped and bloody hole with its absence. Even when I had the hope of finding him, saw him lying in agony on the ground, smoke and craters opening beneath our feet; even when I held his body, breathing in the unique scent that is Spock, felt the steel-sheathed muscles beneath my arms; even then it wasn't enough. Not until he quietly walked toward me on those hollow sounding stones, turned away once and then turned back...to me. Only then could I really believe!

In the fraction of a second it took his brow to arch, the void in my shoulder[?] was healed, seared closed by the gleam in his eyes. And yet during the following days, I had expected...more. My companion was back, but.... I don't know what more I want, but I want more. Maybe tonight, just the two of us, we can...find whatever it is....

It's so dark out there and he's alone...again....

My thoughts returned to the present. "Spock!" I called. "Where are you?" I sent my voice out forcefully, seeking.

"I am here, Jim."

From my right. I jogged toward him, the path winding through the misted plants, plants laden with the evening's irrigation. As I ran on, moisture clung to my clothes as the vegetation stroked me with prickly fingers. I grew cooler as I ran. "Spock," I called as I saw his silhouette flickering in the torch-light that illuminated the garden. "Hi!" I stopped before him, breathing heavily. "Whewww," I wheezed. "Boy, am I out of shape." I slapped my stomach and tried to look rueful.

His gaze softened a bit as he stared down at me. "There is nothing wrong with your...shape. When this episode is over, you will resume your normal exercise."

"Oh, Spock. I don't think I'll ever resume anything."

"Jim, you are far too dramatic."

I dropped my head in mock humility. "Yeah, I know, but it's...."

"...part of you," he finished.

I nodded with a grin. Just being here made me want to smile. Spock turned away. I followed.

"Where are we going?" I asked as we walked further into the darkness. "I hear water, Spock," I said after we'd been walking for a while. "Is there a pond in the garden?"

"Had you not noticed, Jim? We have left the path and the garden and will shortly be on the desert floor."

"We're going to the desert?" I had no idea we were so close.

"Not really," he answered, amusement in his voice. "Only to an isolated area where there is a hot spring. I...thought you might...like it." His words seemed to stumble, as if he were suddenly unsure of my reaction. Hastening to reassure him, I reached out and placed my hand in the center of his back. He didn't start at my touch. For some reason that pleased me.

"I love the idea, Spock," I said to draw his attention away from my hand. "We could use some uninterrupted talking. Haven't had much of an opportunity lately to do much of anything, except try to save our butts and recover your memory."

"That is quite true, Admiral."

We walked for a few more meters and I kept my hand on his back. Luckily I did for he stopped suddenly and my hand cushioned me as my momentum pushed me into him. I laughed against his warm back before pushing away.

"We are here, Jim."

I looked around. My eyes had adjusted to the gloom earlier. Now I saw that the pond glowed a shimmering white. It was easy to see; the night air had cooled considerably and vapor rose from the bubbling surface of the mineral springs.

"A hot spring! Is it okay? I mean for humans?" My shirt was off in a flash. Maybe my words were muffled by the cloth because he didn't answer. "Spock," I repeated when my face had cleared the shirt. "Can I bathe in it?"

His eyes turned to me, following the movement of my hands as they worked on my pants fasteners. His voice was warm. "The water will not harm you. The light is merely a mineral phosphorescence. In fact, you might find the combination of elements...refreshing. I often have."

I laughed. "In water? You? Somehow, I always thought you avoided water like a cat!" I tossed my pants aside, thought about the briefs just for a second, and changed my mind almost immediately. I didn't think Spock was ready for nudity and I wasn't any too sure about myself. I decided to slip them off after I was in the water. "Well, I'm for steam," I said, drawing a lungful of humid air. "Is there a safe spot to enter?"

"There are steps over here."

I brushed past him and the roughness of his robe across my bare arm raised goosebumps all over my body. I stepped down. The heat of the tingling water felt good as the liquid rose over my thighs. "Ah.... Great. Just great. How come there are such smooth steps and ledges?"

"I carved them in my youth."

"Must have taken you quite a while. There are a lot of them."

"I came here often."

I looked up at him. His thoughts were shuttered as he stared into the water. He was outlined against the blackness by the light, and looked as if he were considering the past. I wanted to break into his concentration, to bring him back to...me. I was suddenly lonely.

"Well, don't just stand there, come join me!" I splashed my hand in the water.

With no more than the angled brow, he slipped out of his robe and let it disappear behind him. There was a quiet rustle of bushes. Wearing dark shorts, he stepped into the water and settled beside me on the smooth ledge. I heard him sigh as the water covered his chest.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" I murmured, sliding my eyes sideways, trying not to stare at his bare chest. The black hair coiled as drops of water sparkled on the individual hairs. I had trouble drawing my eyes away.

"Yes. It does indeed. I have missed this." His eyes closed peacefully.

"It's been a long time since you've been home," I commented quietly, not wanting to break his calm. "I mean you've been on Vulcan, but not at home."

"No," he said sharply. "At Gol."

Gol. That word! It still brooded like a canker on my soul. "I'm sorry, Spock. I didn't mean to bring it up."

"We never have discussed it."

"No. We didn't. After V'ger, we just settled into an uneasy peace and then...."

"...Khan."

I swallowed rather loudly when my stomach cramped.

His head turned to the sound. "Is there a problem, Jim?" He was watching me now.

"No. Not really," I answered quickly, shrugging. "You just brought up some painful memories. I'd been trying to forget."

"For me as well," he reminded.

"You? I'm sorry, Spock. I guess I haven't considered your side much. Just selfishly thought about my own pain. You're the one who died."

The words echoed between the bubbling surface and the thick bushes. "What... was it like?" I wondered aloud. "Do you remember anything?" He seemed willing

to talk. Maybe he'd been needing this...release.

"I remember McCoy. His mind...his pain and...."

"...and what?" I could hear there was more beneath his words. I had to prod.

"...and you were not there."

"I know. You weren't here either. It's funny, though. I don't remember when we grew so close. I only knew when you weren't there anymore I was so... alone. More than I had been since before I'd gotten the ...ENTERPRISE. I was a child again. Back on the farm. The same as when my dad died. There was such an emptiness when my mother told me about the accident. I never told you about him, did I?"

His head moved from side to side.

"He was a freighter captain. You knew that." He nodded again and I continued. "There's not much to tell. I idolized him. So did my mother and, when he died in an antimatter overload, we were crushed. It took me two months before I would talk to anyone. It's not that I went around crying. No, I was stunned. Didn't talk to anyone...couldn't. My mom understood. She didn't try to force me to talk, just let me find my own way. After the rough times, we'd share warm fires in the winter and talk of Dad and his hope that I'd be able to do what I wanted to."

"Did he wish for you to go into space?"

"No. Or, rather, he didn't care. He wanted me to do what I wanted." I dropped my eyes. "Of course, all I ever wanted to do was go into space, so...."

"I am certain that he truly cared that you do what you wished. He could not have raised...you as he did were it otherwise."

"Do you really believe that?" Now, I had always thought that. Why did Spock's concurrence mean so much to me?

"I do. Were you lonely much as you adjusted?"

I sank lower in the water, letting the big bubbles cover my lips a moment. He watched me with a slight smile pulling at his eyes.

I blew in the water noisily and sat back up, grinning as I wiped off my face with a swipe of my hand. He still waited.

"It seems I've always been lonely. Even when I had the...ENTERPRISE, there was still something missing. It wasn't until...Khan that I knew what it was." My voice must have dropped because he leaned close to me as if to hear better. I could feel the warmth from his body, even hotter than the water, but I shivered in spite of the heat.

"And what was that, Jim?" He spoke softly. I barely heard him above the rioting water.

I had unconsciously dropped lower in the water again and looked up to find his face inches from mine, his eyes intent, and I couldn't speak. I've never been actually speechless before. Not only couldn't I speak, I couldn't think. His scent rose with the steam, and, as I drew it into my lungs, I felt a wash of comfort flood my body. I relaxed and, without thinking, turned and leaned my head against his shoulder. He allowed it! We sat that way, in silence for a long while, until I sighed and stirred. "As nice as this is, Spock, I...."

"Do not speak, Jim," he said quietly. His chin was resting on the top of my head and the vibration of his deep voice tickled through my head.

"Huh?" I tried to look up, but I couldn't; he kept his chin pressed solidly against my hair. I either had to make a production of moving or stay put.

"Please do not break the silence and comfort of this place. Be still."

My mouth snapped shut. There I was in what was essentially a hot tub, leaning my head on Spock's shoulder, a Vulcan who dislikes water and touch, and he wanted me to lie still!

The water was growing warmer -- or at least it seemed so to me. Sweat was beading on my upper lip. I licked it off, dipped my face into the water quickly and flicked my head. He moved slightly. "I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't mean to soak you."

"Jim, that makes no sense. I am already quite wet."

"Yeah," I laughed. "I guess so. Stupid of me."

"There is very little about you that is stupid."

I twisted my head and looked up at him. *Look at him, sitting there, covered in hot water and looking as cool as a snow sleen.* "You're my number one fan, aren't you, Spock?"

"I have been from the first time I saw you."

"You have? From the first? Tell me about it." This time I got him! "Spock! You're blushing!"

"I am not," he denied.

"Well, do you want to tell me why you're green?"

"I am always green to some extent."

"Not to this one! Your ear tips are positively verdant."

"It is extremely warm in the water, thus relaxing my capillaries and flooding...."

"Bullshit!"

"I beg your pardon?" His face was placid as the brow rose and I laughed at

him.

"You heard me, Mister. You can't get away with it this time. You're blushing because you're embarrassed, and I'm going to hear the reason for it." He darkened again, looking nervous, and I suddenly realized what I was doing to my best friend. Spock always accepted my teasing but this threatened to go further than that.

"I'm sorry, Spock. Forgive me, I was just teasing you. You don't have to tell me if it's uncomfortable for you, but I really did want to hear what you thought about me when I first took command of the ENTERPRISE."

His face changed as if he were considering my words. I turned away, trying to concentrate on the bubbles.

His whispered words were so soft, for a moment I wasn't certain that he was actually speaking aloud; it was more of a vibration between us.

"You materialized on the pads and stood completely still, as if you were listening to the ship breathe."

I almost held my breath as he lifted his arm and placed it behind my neck along the ledge. I automatically pressed closer to his ribs.

"I, of course, had researched your complete biography but nothing, not even the phenomenal career that I read about, could prepare me for your arrival. You were...." He paused a moment, searching for words, and I forced myself not to move, not to breath. "...lightning sealed within a compact body, with all the glitter and sparks and potential of a mountain thunderstorm. Suddenly the transporter room was illuminated and I realized that my past life had been lived in darkness. When your eyes found mine, I felt as if a bolt had found my heart, and I knew my life would never be the same again. I felt no remorse for that dull, steady person I was leaving behind. You were a freshness in my life."

I interrupted him. "Don't say that, Spock. You're not dull!"

"Perhaps not to you, but from my side of the control panel, I have always appeared so."

I shook my head to negate what he'd been saying, but didn't want to distract him. He continued.

"Do you remember that first time?" he asked. I could feel his head turn down toward mine, feel the tickle of his breath, cool on my hot skin.

I nodded, bumping his chin. "I had no idea it had affected you so."

"How...did it affect you?" He sounded hesitant. It was seldom that he questioned me about anything except business. I knew he was having trouble controlling his curiosity.

I answered as honestly as I could, letting my thoughts fly back to the instant when our eyes first met. "I remember exactly what my thoughts were: 'My ghod! What a man! My First Officer. They couldn't have given me a better one. The honesty in his eyes...so calm...so reserved. Waiting before he makes his



decision about me. What we couldn't do between the two of us! The universe!" I had straightened up while speaking and his arm slid around my back and pulled at me gently, unconsciously. I settled again against his side. "I guess I got carried away. But you did make an impression on me."

"You made more of one on me." His words were whispered.

"Did you...like me?" *Shit! What a stupid question. Fishing for compliments always gets you into trouble.*

He chuckled! The vibrations reached my side. I could hear/feel the humor. "Of course." He paused a second. "As much as a Vulcan could."

I sat up straight, swung around to watch his eyes. "You're teasing me!"

"I apologize, Jim. I could not resist the opportunity."

"Just don't let it happen again."

"I shall make a supreme effort, Admiral."

Don't let anyone tell you that Vulcans have no sense of humor.

He didn't say anything else and I stared into the water, unconsciously poking my fingers into the large bubbles to pop them. "You likened me to a thunderstorm," I said, attempting to put him back on track.

"I did indeed, for you are the...power inherent in the most volatile of storms. And yet there are soft rolling clouds in your personality as well as the electric current that always flashes behind your eyes. Does that fulfill your need to 'hear' my feelings? Do you wish more?"

Guilt rose in me. He wasn't chastising me, but I was. I'd asked more than any Vulcan should be forced to show. "I--I'm sorry, Spock. It wasn't fair of me to force you into that. Please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. These things are a part of me. I do not...care to hide from you. If you wish to know these things, then it is my privilege to offer them to you."

I turned under his arm, flipping my hips completely over until I rested almost across his lap. I put my left arm behind me, across his body, and propped myself up so I could look at him. The water must have rocked me or I looked insecure, for he gently slid one arm around my waist to offer more support. I shivered mightily in the hot water, gulped and spoke: "I have always asked more of you than was fair. And I knew it at the time. But I couldn't resist...knowing more about you, getting closer to the real you that rested so close to the surface. I just had to know. It's one of my worst faults."

"You have only faults that add to your being."

"Thank you, my friend." I blinked rapidly, suddenly confused by the tears that were filling my eyes at the tenderness I saw nakedly on his face. "I -- I love you as well."

This time it was his turn to look confused. His head dropped, hair falling over his eyes. He hadn't cut it yet and it clung in wet strands, hiding his emotions from me. I reached up to brush them away.

"I can't see you with your hair covering your face. I need to see your eyes if I'm going to understand what you're saying." He quivered when my hands touched him. "You're not upset when I speak of love, are you, Spock? Because that's what we've been talking about for the last hour. Love."

"I am not...upset. Merely attempting to control my emotions. As you have always been aware, Vulcans are riddled with emotions. While I may be...embarrassed, I must confess that often I have thought of having this discussion."

"You have? Why the hell didn't you tell me? I've wanted to say these things for years! For years, Spock. Oh, Spock, when you died...." I couldn't speak anymore. From out of nowhere, the cloying blackness that surrounded us as he slid to the floor in the Engine Room sucked my breath away and I felt like throwing up. My eyes closed, I felt lightheaded and his arms wrapped around me completely, forcing my chest against his, face into his neck. Try as I would to stop it, one lonely sob escaped my lips before my teeth snapped down on them to still their trembling.

"I am most sorrowful for having caused you such great distress."

"Oh, Spock," I choked, my face still pressed into the hard, warm body. "It wasn't your fault. It was only because I didn't tell you...I let you lie there without telling you...."

"I knew, Jim. I knew even then. Why do you think I allowed us to be apart during this time on Vulcan? I needed the time to prepare myself to tell you this. To tell you that I...need you. I do not want to be...apart from you ever again. I had to prepare for your possible reply.... The devastation of rejection could be considerable."

"I wouldn't hurt you knowingly, Spock. You know that."

"I do. And yet, if you do not...reciprocate...do not...need as I do...." His words stopped. The taut body beneath my head shuddered once. I slid a few inches away from him.

I didn't speak, just watched the emotions rage across his down-turned face. I watched through the wet, concealing hair with fascination and love. This constant battle was Spock; something I loved, needed. I watched as he struggled to firm his face before he could meet my eyes.

"Spock," I whispered, "bend down here, please." His eyes caught mine and he obeyed, his shivers increasing. I watched the trembling lips approach and without hesitation -- indeed, greedily -- I kissed his half-open mouth. My arms wound around his neck, holding him close in case he attempted to retreat. He didn't...but he didn't respond either.

I pulled away. "Are you all right?" I questioned, hoping he couldn't feel my pounding heart that was ground into his groin. Groin -- my pulse picked up speed at the thought.

He didn't speak, only nodded slightly and lowered his mouth again. I accepted the offer and kissed him again. He groaned, hot fingers grasping my waist tighter, and I knew I'd have bruises tomorrow. I didn't care. Our mouths fell apart. We needed breath. "I want you, Spock," I gasped, my words wrenched from within. "Can you...handle that?"

"That and anything more you wish to give." His large hands gathered my body, turning it easily in the buoying water, and sat me on his lap. "Can you 'handle' this?" he said, passion thickening his words. His hands grasped my head, holding it steady, and he drove his hot, seeking tongue deep into my mouth. This time I groaned when his erection nudged between my legs. *Sneaky Vulcan! How the hell did he manage to get his shorts off without me noticing?*

Our ragged breaths rasped in the cool night air. We didn't speak. Couldn't. My penis, full and hard at his first touch as he ripped my briefs from me and flung them away, poked out of the water. He eyed it hungrily.

He raised one hand, allowing a finger to trace the swollen head. Then I was encased within his hand. I writhed uncontrollably as his fingers closed into a fist and began a rhythmic massage. My head swam, my breath caught on itself with each stroke of the powerfully gentle hand.

"Spock...."

He leaned down and caught my mouth with his again, silencing me. I didn't mind, didn't think...couldn't for the passion rising steadily upward, threatening to choke me with its tenderness.

I must have sobbed beneath his lips, for he pulled away and looked deeply into my eyes.

"Do not torture yourself, Jim. Let it go. Let the pain go." He kissed me again. His hand had stilled and now took up the rhythm again. He looked into my eyes and I felt my heart still then begin to beat again. I pushed his hand away.

"No, Spock," I said, scooting around on his lap. "Later. First, I want you!" I was determined to join with him, to wipe out the dark pain, the aching memory of my life without him. I felt the need to be cleansed, to hold him within me.

I straddled him, my head higher than his, and I kissed the wet, sweet-smelling hair beneath my chin. "In me. I want you in me, please, Spock," I whispered, pulling my legs under me to lift enough to allow the long length of his organ to find entrance. When I felt the softness catch and slide between my legs, I lowered myself, his arms offering a support as I dropped. When the flared head caught the puckering of my anus, we groaned in unison.

"Jim..., " he managed to speak. "...pain...."

"No. No pain. I'm too relaxed and you'll go slow. It won't hurt much and I need this...want this...please, Spock?" I knew he'd do it if I asked him. I also knew he wouldn't if he thought there would be any pain for me at all. I deliberately sat down and bit my tongue at the sensation of fullness that flooded my body and my mind. "It's okay, Spock. The pain's not bad." Trying to speak

was a chore. My testicles tightened wonderfully in preparation, my nerves sang with tension and I dropped lower. He groaned again, this time unable to contain one small upward thrust of his hips and a hotness suddenly shot into me.

He's come. In that one movement, he's climaxed. The thought alone of Spock in orgasm exploded my own and, with the sensations, I collapsed against him, my head nuzzling in his hair. "Oh, Spock."

"I know, Jim," he murmured into my neck. "I know. Does...this...feeling blot out the past?"

"I don't want to remove the past, Spock. It's part of why I love you. But now we're clean, free to start again. This is just the dawn of a new life for us. This was waiting for us just on the other side of the darkness. It took you a long time but," I licked some water off his brow, "you've come home...to me!"

His lips fastened hungrily on my throat and he growled his answer.

CITIES

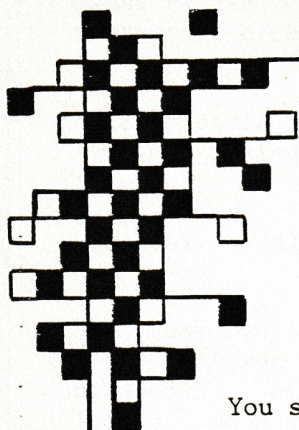


Like cities in the distance,
mica in sand,
fires of a border war:
the stars.

Like your eyes
caught in the first light
of new love,
body tight
in glowing arms.



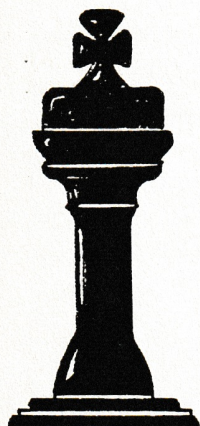
natasha solten



STALEMATE

You say you love me,
you say you care,
that you wish to spend the rest of your life in my arms.
All I can do is shake my head,
all I can feel is your desperation,
the ringing sadness in your voice as you speak.
And when I look at you,
and when you turn away,
the truth resounds like thunder in our ears.
What you say may be true,
what you feel may be eternal,
yet the fear with which you face me is like ashes on my tongue.
Such agony in your eyes,
such fear of loss;
neither reason for irrationality or impulsiveness.
I smile at you,
I kiss the puzzled frown on your lips,
And take you into my life, accepting what will be,
not yet looking at what can not.

FARIS VINCENT



TIME PASSAGE

Charla Menke

Uhura turned anxious eyes to the tall figure sitting in the center seat. "Mr. Spock, I've lost contact with the captain! That last salvo from the alien pursuing him must have damaged his transmitter."

The line of the Vulcan's jaw set firmer as he answered, "Acknowledged, Lieutenant."

"Sir!" It was Sulu now, watching his screen with worried eyes. "The alien is gaining on him. I think he's going to fire again!"

"Acch! He's oot o' transporter range! If only we hadna lost our phasers....," Scott spoke to no one in particular.

"Indeed, Engineer. However, I believe we may have damaged the alien vessel before that happened. Let us hope that it may have weakened him sufficiently to...."

Sulu broke in, "Mr. Spock, the alien is firing again...again...."

All eyes were on the forward viewscreen now, watching the specks of light that were the captain of the ENTERPRISE in his shuttlecraft and the alien scout ship engaged in their death struggle. Suddenly, the whole screen glowed with blinding light and went blank.

"Lieutenant Uhura, recover the image, please. Mr. Chekov, report!"

The young Russian could not take his eyes from the console before him. "Sir," he gulped, realization numbing him. "Sir, de alien has been destroyed...."

Spock nodded slightly. "As I thought, the effort of firing his weapons

was too much for his weakened vessel. The captain, Mr. Chekov?" There was no reply and Spock raised an eyebrow in irritation. "Mr. Chekov!"

Chekov turned toward him now, his eyes unusually bright. "Sir...de Keptin ...he's gone!"

As if to confirm the worst, Uhura resecured the image on the forward screen at that moment and every pair of eyes on the Bridge gazed into empty space. Uhura gasped and Scott's burr rasped out, "Oh, noo! Poor laddie!"

Chekov was regaining some composure. "Dat blast, Mr. Spock...vatever propulsion de alien used, it's nothink like ours. Ven it vent...it took de Keptin, too!"

"Both o' them destroyed, just like that?" asked the engineer from where he stood, arm around Uhura.

Spock's voice was crisp with confidence he did not have. "That has not been confirmed, Mr. Scott. All scanners, complete forward sweep, maximum range." The Bridge crew jumped to comply, the knowledge heavy in their hearts that it would do no good. There was nothing out there to find. The stardate was 2222.5 and the Starship ENTERPRISE had just lost her captain.

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Kirk was not aware of having extracted himself from the wrecked shuttle, but he saw the figure approaching and stumbled toward it.

The young female ran to the dazed man and steadied him. "Are you all right, sir?"

Kirk brushed the dust off his trousers, relieved that nothing seemed broken. "Yes, yes I'm fine...Miss?"

"Jessup...Skye Jessup. My tricorder registered an impact here. I was expecting to find a meteorite...not a crashed vessel." She studied his face closely, a question forming behind the brown eyes. "And who are you?"

"Sorry. Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S ENTERPRISE. I was attacked by an alien vessel...he exploded...I crash-landed here." Suddenly, it dawned on him. "Wait a minute, what are you doing here? We've been surveying this planet for an outpost, but it's supposed to be uninhabited...."

She was shaking her head, carefully observing his shuttlecraft. "Captain Kirk," she murmured. "Yes, I'd know that face anywhere."

Kirk overheard her. "What?"

"Oh, I've seen pictures," she replied absently. Suddenly, she was all

business. "Captain, check this chronometer reading, please."

Kirk fussed with the tricorder she handed him. "Not functioning properly," he said, observing the reading.

"It reads 2235.5, does it not?"

He looked at her warily. "Why, yes, as a matter of fact, it does."

She cocked her pretty red head to one side. "Captain Kirk, you're going to find this hard to believe." She waited to gain his complete attention. "The chronometer is correct. This is stardate 2235.5. You were believed killed in action exactly 13 years ago today over this planet." Kirk staggered a little before her friendly smile. "You'd better sit down, Captain."

"How do you....," he began, fighting the fog in his brain.

"It's all a matter of historical record and I've done some research. My employer has an interest in the subject." She smiled at the man sitting uncomfortably on the boulder before her. This was going to be quite a challenge. "I've often wished I could meet you. You're a hero, you know."

Kirk shot her a rueful smile. "I don't feel like any hero." The wheels in his mind were turning again, carrying him forward on their momentum. "If this really is 2235, then I must have passed through some kind of...time vortex...when the alien exploded. My shuttle needs repairs. I have to go back...my ship...."

She smiled patiently and her brown eyes twinkled. "All in good time, Captain. Pardon the choice of phrase. Your craft needs extensive repair and travelling time warps is not easily done. I'm an astrophysicist, so I know." She watched him closely as she said very carefully, "It may not be possible for you to go back."

"But if you found me, there must be facilities here to make it feasible... research personnel, computer banks, repair materials...."

"Captain, in the past 13 years, a small Federation research outpost has been established here. There are only 25 people on the entire planet. My employer and I are the only people in this quadrant." She saw the anxiety settle in his eyes. "Try not to worry. If anyone here can help you out, it's my boss. Of course, that still doesn't take into account a myriad of variables, but he'll sort them out fast enough."

She settled her hands on her hips and spent a moment evaluating the figure before her. "I hope you're up to another surprise."

Kirk looked at her with chagrin. "Do I have a choice?"

She shrugged. "Afraid not. You see, I am research assistant to a certain Vulcan...Professor Spock."

"Spock?" Kirk shouted with joy. "You mean Commander Spock, my Spock, is here?" His face was alight with pleasure and relief. "We've run into time warps before, Spock and I. Take me to him right away." He stood up, ready to leave in response to his order. It hadn't struck him that she wasn't a member of his crew.

She shook her curly, red hair. "I realize this must be terribly difficult for you to accept, but you must remember that 13 years have passed. Everyone believed you were killed in that explosion you mentioned. No trace was found. For 13 years, Professor Spock has believed you dead."

Kirk sat back down, sobered by the thought. "All the more reason I should go to him as soon as possible."

Skye settled beside him on the boulder. "Captain Kirk," she said gently, "there's more. Spock...is changed." She hesitated, saw Kirk's concern turning itself to fear and continued. "He's blind, Captain."

She saw him wince, as though she ^{had} stabbed him deeply. "Blind! What? What happened?"

"An injury from the battle which followed..." she gestured apologetically, "your 'death'. He was retired from the fleet and turned to research. He requested assignment here when the outpost was set up."

Kirk looked up into the brown eyes and she could almost read his thoughts. Spock requesting assignment on the planet Kirk had 'died' trying to defend. Her smile was very warm. "After all these years, he's still mourning."

Kirk flinched under the bright, unwavering gaze. Memories of Spock's devotion crowded his brain. "I've got to go to him."

She laid a restraining hand on his arm. "It's not that simple. You just can't burst in on him, back from the dead, after all these years! He's no longer a well man."

She could see his struggle with reality. To him, it was still 2222.5. "Captain Kirk, understand; this is not the world you disappeared from 13 years ago. Spock is not the Vulcan you remember as your first officer. I have been his assistant for the past 3 years and I learned very quickly that his career in Starfleet is a closed subject.

"I made the mistake, just once, of asking about a certain small, holographic portrait which hangs in his study. The official Starfleet portrait of a young captain, James T. Kirk. I was told precisely, completely, and succinctly the story of your career and your untimely 'death'. Then I was given to understand that the subject was never to be raised again. I have never raised it, Captain, although I have done some reading on my own concerning the ENTERPRISE. Whatever else I have perceived has come from watching the Professor with your medals."

Kirk was jarred from his drifting reverie. "Medals?"

"The ones you left him, remember? Their case is worn after all these years, but they still shine like new. I've watched him different times, sitting at his desk toying with those medals, gazing at nothing with his sad, sightless eyes, lost in thought. I can only imagine what thoughts." She could see Kirk imagining as well. "From these things, I've learned that 13 years is a long time to grieve, Captain. Having you return like this will require some consideration for Spock. His health has not been good since his injury. He may not be strong enough for this."

"I'm not sure I am, either, Miss Jessup." His honesty was disarming. He stood up. He was beginning to like her brown eyes. "I need help...yours, Spock's. I'm a man out of time here. If I can get back where I belong, maybe all of this can be changed...my 'death', Spock's blindness. Miss Jessup, I have to try."

She smiled again. "Of course you do," she said, and began to walk with him towards the shuttle. "The Professor will need more data."

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She left Kirk outside in the laboratory where he would hear the conversation, but remain safe from Spock's acute hearing, and his own emotional responses, at least for the time being. She laid her tricorder on the table near the door and saw Spock at the desk in his living quarters, gazing past her at the door he could not see.

"I'm sorry I took so long, Professor, but I ran into this...new arrival... and he had...some fascinating theories on time continu~~as~~...."

"Indeed?" One dark Vulcan eyebrow raised in speculation.

She knew she had him interested. It was a good start. "Yes, he's been involved in some...experiments with time warps and he had...some intriguing theories on things like space derelicts, missing spacecraft...."

"Theories require proof, Jessup."

"Of course, but think of the possibilities, Professor! Why, if some of his theories are correct, there could be hope for persons we conventionally consider lost beyond hope...." She hardly dared to say it. "Your Captain Kirk, for instance." She held her breath. Mentioning that forbidden name was a desperate maneuver that might cost her a job. What would it cost the man beyond the door?

Spock stood before the starport as though he could see the marker buoys that circled, like small moons, the limits of Federation Outpost Theta. His

sightless eyes saw something else beyond the planet's atmosphere. "I watched Captain Kirk die 13 years ago." He clasped his hands together behind his back in an attitude of rigid control. "Today, of all days, what hope could you offer me?"

The young assistant shook her head. "Professor, I can't believe that your friend would have wanted you to lock yourself away like this. You've all but abandoned life!" She stopped short at the rising angle of Spock's brows.

"In order to...achieve discipline, I have, as you say, 'locked myself away'." His voice was very level, very quiet. That was what most betrayed his inner struggle. "What were my alternatives? To leave myself open to further involvement?" Spock shook his head. "No, Jessup. Once I looked into another's eyes and trusted. Once I heard a familiar laugh and rejoiced in it." The young woman could see the painful recollection behind the darkened Vulcan eyes and she pitied it. "Once I touched a mind and made it one with my own...." The voice carried a fullness then, for an instant, and went on. Spock straightened his shoulders against the weight they bore. "Indeed, I have abandoned that."

Beyond the door, Kirk marvelled at Spock's revelations. *At last! he thought with excitement. At last, he's learned to acknowledge the inner man he's kept concealed so long!* Kirk paced with agitation. He knew a painful price must have been paid for Spock to have undergone such a transformation. *What else has changed, I wonder?*

Spock was looking now in the direction of the portrait he could not see and yet had never packed away. She knew that face must be indelible in his mind. "I am surprised that you, of all people, Jessup, would speak to me of hope without foundation."

She swallowed hard; her pity for the ^man threatened her resolve. "Professor, I have met someone who has...facts...which may convince you of the possibility. Please, I have never asked you for anything. Please, speak with him. He's just outside and it could make such a difference!" She decided to make the challenge. "I have never before known you to close your mind against any new concept."

There was great weariness in his voice and a reluctance to give up the reminiscences she was disturbing. "You have been my finest assistant. If you find the theory of interest, I owe it some consideration. Bring in your acquaintance."

She turned, triumphant, to the door and Kirk, but was halted by Spock's voice. "Jessup, you are never again to approach this subject. It is...distressing to me."

"Yes, Professor." She slipped through the doorway past Kirk and said to both of them, "I'll be next door setting up that new program." To Kirk

alone she whispered, "Go easy on him. This will be quite a shock." Kirk nodded and she vanished through the door.

Kirk was uncertain how to proceed. Another time he would have gone joyfully to the Vulcan, but here in his grief, his blindness, Spock seemed so vulnerable that Kirk had no idea of what to do. He'd heard enough to know that this mellowed Spock would be a new experience.

It was Spock who made the first move. He sensed the other's entrance into the room. "Yes, who is it, please?" The sightless eyes looked in Kirk's direction and the captain was forced to remind himself that the Vulcan was blind.

The grey hair at Spock's temples, in his dark bangs, the shadows in the eye sockets now without their sparkle, left Kirk feeling awkward and disturbed. Seeing Spock like this; older, leaner, his face more lined, more angular than Kirk remembered, made it easier for the captain to accept the fact that he had been propelled into the future. It did not help him adjust to the change in Spock.

"Who is there?" the Vulcan asked again.

Fools rush in..., Kirk thought. "It's me, Spock!" He waited, letting Spock recognize his voice. "It's Jim!"

He was unprepared for the frigid wrath that instantly covered Spock's face like a mask. "How dare you?!" Spock's voice was like a hammer to Kirk's heart. "Who are you to play such a macabre joke?"

"No, Spock, it's no joke! I wasn't killed in the explosion. I was... jettisoned...through a time corridor. It really is me. Spock. I swear to you!"

The dark head shook imperceptibly. "No...." The face filled with strain. The line of his mouth weakened as he asked again, "Who are you, to deceive my assistant and be so cruel to me?"

In four long strides, Kirk was before him, searching the familiar face for a sign of recognition. His hands fell on the Vulcan's shoulders. "Spock, believe me." He reached down and took the Vulcan's long fingers and placed them on his face. "Let your fingers see me, old friend. They know this face. You know my voice."

Spock's fingers touched his face, his hair, but the dark head shook from side to side. The thin lips said, "Illusion. Clever impersonation. Similar bone structure...." But the mind beneath the dark hair whispered doubts. *The same footsteps, same sunlit, grassy scent, same cool flesh?*

Kirk cast about helplessly. He noticed the case on the desk top with the Starfleet insignia nearly worn away and swallowed hard. He had to convince

him. "Spock, there is one way you can be certain of me. One way no one could fake. The mind meld. Use it, Spock! I'm not lying to you. Touch my mind!"

The tall, slender figure tried to step from his grasp, still shaking his head, now visibly distressed. Kirk saw the gray hair, the blind eyes, the raw emotion no longer carefully concealed. He hated himself for bullying his friend. Still, as Spock himself used to say, there was 'no alternative.' The Vulcan had pulled himself up to his full, impressive height. His regal bearing still held the awesome Vulcan dignity. "NO! I have vowed never to use the mind meld again. I have not practiced it...in many years. I cannot!"

Kirk felt a hand squeezing his heart. He knew what had prompted Spock to abandon the mind meld. It would have happened 13 years ago. Kirk found a new resolve and began again. His eyes never left the long face before him.

"Spock, can you let me come to you begging for help and turn your back on me? Are you so willing to believe I'm dead?" He could tell he was striking raw nerve. He saw the pain go deeper with each word, and cursed himself as he went on shaking the slender shoulders. He knew he must break through to him or they were both lost. "Spock, have I really meant so little to you?"

It was cruel, but Kirk felt the tension loosen in the shoulders beneath his hands. Spock had reached some decision.

"Very well," said the deep voice with cool formality. "If you insist, I shall probe your mind." Kirk knew what it cost the Vulcan to take this risk.

The long fingers took their familiar position on Kirk's face. The captain welcomed the lightness, the delicacy of the touch. He cleared his mind as best he could and waited.

Spock, still resisting the illogical possibility, began to speak as though they had never been joined before. "My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your...." Suddenly, the touch drove deeper than usual and reverberated in Kirk's chest. It throbbed with the engine of his life and travelled through his startled body like an electric shock. Kirk's mind merged with other thoughts, visions, sensations, and he knew all of Spock's 13 years in seconds.

Then recognition came; welcoming, embracing, warm and alive again. The ancient loneliness was driven out. In its place, Kirk sensed a difference in the meld. Spock had always controlled their tenuous mental link, never before permitting such a level of intimacy. Kirk's mind accepted the surge along the bond between them, acknowledging a special revelation, long suspected, but unspoken. A secret voice somewhere inside Kirk answered 'yes!' to a question that he felt more than heard.

Spock's fingers left the pressure points and, as the tingle of his mind touch lingered, Kirk felt a warm, golden glow while the slender Vulcan hands trailed paths of warmth down his face, over the pulse beat of his neck and,

finally closed on his shoulders. The Vulcan knew the strength he touched. The moment lengthened. At the sight of the Vulcan's transfigured face, Kirk wanted to hope and feared he wanted too much. Hazel eyes shone with a new luster as he smiled up at the sightless dark ones. "Spock...." The name was spoken like a prayer.

"It is you...." The quiet voice wavered, attempting a recovery of composure. "Jim...after all these years...." Suddenly, there it was, Kirk's salvation: a soft smile on the Vulcan's mouth.

Kirk reached out with a searching hand, his own vision suddenly blurring, and found strong arms around him, drawing him close against the lean chest. He pressed his face against Spock's shoulder and murmured his question into the soft, black tunic with its runic symbols. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

One of Spock's hands was stroking the hair at the back of Kirk's neck, instinctively comforting, calming. "I was afraid."

Kirk drew back slightly to watch the expression, or lack of it, upon his friend's face. "You've never been afraid of anything!"

The dark head shook slightly. "Incorrect, Jim. I was afraid of losing you...that you might pull away from me...that our relationship might change."

Kirk hugged the Vulcan with a kindling warmth. "What made you tell me now?"

Spock's expression showed some chagrin. "It was not deliberate. Having already lost you...I could not...help myself. The shock of finding you here, alive...."

Kirk fought the strangling sensation in his throat. "I understand, Spock. I'm a little off balance, myself." He ran his hand gently over the hard muscled back. "I haven't pulled away." He hesitated momentarily, pointing out how tightly their embrace continued, while he searched for words. "It is true that our...relationship has changed."

"Has it?" Spock betrayed his anxiety by a slight tensing of his muscles and the infinitesimal loosening of his embrace.

"Indeed it has, my Vulcan," Kirk replied quietly, reaching up to trace the curved line of one ear with delicate appreciation. "You know that in my thoughts, as well as yours, the possibility has been hidden for years under other labels; duty, friendship, brotherhood. There is something more, isn't there?"

He could feel Spock's angular cheek against his hair, heard the deep voice above him. "Here I am no longer bound to you by duty. Our friendship and our brotherhood remain. What would you name this newest level we have reached?"

"Infinite diversity in infinite combinations, Spock?"

Spock's thoughts crowded his brain with remembered gentleness and joy. The resonance of their link was singing in his mind. "Agreed. I could name it such."

That was the special secret that had kept their lives on course. Kirk smiled, although he knew the Vulcan could not see it. His hand moved from the upswept ear to nestle in the heavy black hair. Emotion swam in his voice. Something broke inside and flooded him with warmth and tenderness for this already-treasured friend. "I would call it love...", his cool lips whispered before they brushed Spock's mouth.

Kirk leaned back slightly to watch the Vulcan's face transform a look of wonder into one of delight. "Jim...." Spock pulled him back, this time seeking Kirk's mouth with his own demanding kiss. His disbelief was still changing into joy. "My brave, my beautiful...", he whispered softly into the light brown hair. "I had never thought to have this."

Kirk laughed softly. "We both seem to be encountering unusual circumstances today."

Spock nodded. "We have yet to deal properly with yours. There is much to be discussed. Jessup will wonder what has happened."

"What has happened, Spock?"

The long Vulcan fingers brushed his cheek lovingly. "We both were lost. Now we have found each other."

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Their work began when they summoned the young astrophysicist back from her self-imposed absence. Far into the night they sat; three figures sharing all the knowledge they had on time distortion, going over the possibilities, however dim, of reconstructing Kirk's passage through time.

Through it all, Kirk was aware of Jessup's brown eyes watching, of the pale hands recording figures, feeding data into the tricorder. He was also aware of the other warmth that embraced him; of the glow that still lit the corners of his mind. Even though his mind was occupied with finding a solution to the time distortion, he was aware of a distinct sense of coming home.

It was very late when the young scientist rose to leave. She took a large collection of material with her, promising to return the next day and begin the search through their computer's data banks for the additional information they would need. Spock was already planning repairs to the shuttle. Kirk followed the young woman to the door, seeking a chance to speak privately

with her. "You don't think my presence here will create difficulties for him with his work, his colleagues?"

She shook her head. "He has no colleagues, Captain. There will be no difficulty keeping your presence a secret, or in attempting to repair your craft. As for his work...." She smiled. "I can't imagine anything being more important to him than you." She looked at him with a smile that made Kirk wonder how much she surmised. "Rest well." When she had gone, Kirk found himself relieved to be alone with Spock.

The Vulcan spoke from the divan behind him. "You must be very tired. You should rest now."

Kirk's hands pressed Spock's shoulders to keep him from rising. "No, Spock, not yet. I have to talk with you. There's so much I still don't understand about all this. How our lives will be, have been, effected by my 'death'. I'm here, but the ENTERPRISE thinks I'm dead. I left you in command there only hours ago, and yet you're here with me now, unchanged and yet altered more than I would ever want. Spock, explain it to me! Help me understand!"

Spock pulled the hands down towards him. "Sit with me. I shall tell you all I know of this. First, you must not concern yourself with me. You, Jim, are the one constant factor in both these dimensions. Only one dimension can be reality, the other is only possibility. Which do you believe this one to be?"

Kirk stared into the sightless eyes. "My reality, until hours ago, was on the Bridge of the ENTERPRISE with you beside me."

Spock nodded. "Agreed. Therefore, by being artificially wrested from that sphere of existence, you have created an alternative universe here. An error against universal law exists and must be corrected."

"But that worries me, Spock. At what expense can it be corrected?"

"If you truly belong where we agree that you do, then rectifying this error will only restore the natural state of things. Time would then continue from that point, and all would be as you remember."

Kirk smiled. "I'm not certain I want everything to remain the same...."

A faint smile tinged the strong lines of the Vulcan's mouth. "I must caution you, that I am powerless to guarantee that we can rectify the situation. The possibility remains that you may be trapped here. You must be prepared for that. We shall try to send you back to the ENTERPRISE, but we may fail."

"I understand."

Spock nodded. "There is one more thing."

The younger man leaned closer. "Yes?"

"It might be easier, and undoubtedly less dangerous to you, if you remained here."

Kirk's brows rose in surprise. "You are afraid of failure, aren't you? Spock, if we try...and fail...what will happen?"

The dark head shook. "Unknown."

"Could I destroy...everything if we fail? The world of the ENTERPRISE, your world here, all of us?" Kirk felt light-headed at the idea.

Spock's tone was thoughtful. "It is a possibility."

Kirk's throat was dry. "Until now, I've only been thinking about my desire to get back. I hadn't considered the impact this could have on everything else...on you." He thought of the first officer he had left on his Bridge and spoke more to himself than to Spock. "Still, if there's any chance that this need never happen to you...."

Spock steepled his fingers before him. "Jim, you must not blame yourself for my misfortune. You must decide."

Kirk's eyes clouded in the presence of the strength and patience he had always relied on. "There are...attractions to this place. I'm tempted to stay here with you." He took one of the Vulcan's hands into his own, tracing the green veins with one finger.

Spock confronted the inescapable truth his infallible logic had presented, and it was like having his living heart torn out. The dark head turned toward the man he loved. "You forget; Spock also awaits you aboard the ENTERPRISE. If I help you leave here, it is because I send you back...to myself. A younger and sighted Vulcan waits for you there...and, even now, does not know if you are alive or dead."

The captain heard the painful honesty in the words and recognized a sudden longing for his other world, his other Vulcan; still unmarked by pain, untouched by age. Despite himself, the longing grew. "Spock, I belong there, not here where I'm an anomaly...a man out of time...useless and a burden to all." He released the Vulcan's hand. The sound of his breaking voice drove deeply into Spock's reverie. "I must go back, Spock!"

The Vulcan gazed blindly into a void beyond his steepled fingers. Whatever dimension held them, it was difficult to relinquish Kirk to his fate. The anticipated loss clutched at him with vicious claws. To lose Kirk again was to be cast into that void. The only thing of which the Vulcan was completely certain was that whatever Kirk desired, he must have. He shielded

his thoughts against the possibility of a future without love. His voice was soft when he answered. "I shall help you."

Some remnant of their mind link whispered to Kirk of the Vulcan's distress. He heard its echo deep within himself. He put his arm around the bony shoulders and moved close. "We still have time together here," he whispered into the pointed ear. He turned the Vulcan's face toward him with his other hand. "I want you, Spock." He kissed the Vulcan's thin mouth with insistent lips that sought reply.

Spock did not resist. He pulled the human tight against him, and returned the kiss. Hot Vulcan lips pressed down on Kirk's and took his breath away. The tip of Spock's warm tongue ran over the human lips, and Kirk felt a shiver of expectancy run through his body. Their hands began to move in hesitant exploration as they caressed each other's face, and hair and neck.

Kirk, always aggressive, brought his mouth to his Vulcan's throat, urging him on with light, teasing kisses. His human fingers fumbled with the Vulcan fasteners of the tunic.

Spock's restraining hand brought him up short. "No, Jim," he said gently. To soften the rejection, he ran one long-fingered hand through Kirk's dishevelled hair with loving grace and stroked his temple, hinting at the meld. "This we may have...no more."

Kirk drew back with shocked surprise. The sound of bitterness and tears crept into his voice. "But, Spock, we both want it! Why?" He shrank from the Vulcan's touch. "Or have you changed your mind?"

The dark head shook. "It would not be possible to change what I feel for you."

"Then why?"

The Vulcan fingers stroked Kirk's cheek. "Patience, Jim, and hear my words as I intend them." He waited, feeling Kirk's angry frustration subside. "You already know control of the meld escaped me earlier." Kirk nodded his head in assent. "Then understand; if we were to...become more intimate...it would be impossible for me...to restrain from bonding with you...completely."

Kirk clutched at Spock's hand, desperately fighting his sense of rejection. "I understand that. I'm not afraid."

Spock continued to shake his head and proceeded very slowly. "It would be dangerous, Jim."

"Dangerous? How?" Suspicion chipped away at Kirk's defenses. "Explain to me."

Spock recognized the captain's tone of command. "Such bonding is for

life, Jim. It cannot be undone except...."

"...by death," Kirk finished for him. His eyes were flooding. "You mean if I didn't make it back...you might die, too?"

Spock felt the dampness on the human's face. He brushed it away with one finger, caressing Kirk's hair, speaking to the handsome, earnest face he could only picture in his mind. "I mean that we agreed that this dimension is only...possibility. Remember? You are not...mine to keep. I have no right to claim you as a bonded mate. That requires vows, commitments that neither of us can make...here. It would be dangerous for both of us."

"And unfair to the Spock aboard the ENTERPRISE," Kirk said quietly.

Spock nodded, knowing he understood at last. "We have no right to risk... the future...for an evening's passion. I cannot take advantage of you so."

"You've always been the wiser of us. I suppose you're right about this, too." Kirk's smile was frail and regretful. "Oh, Spock...I wanted it so much!"

The Vulcan's strong arms gathered him in again, holding him close, comforting him as though he were a small child. "I know, Jim. I know. Forgive me, but I cannot...steal...that which is rightfully another's place, even if that other is myself in another dimension. Perhaps, if all goes well, in time...we shall have this chance again."

Kirk wrapped his arms around the Vulcan's neck. "I could choose to stay."

Spock smiled indulgently. "Your passion speaks now, not your mind. You know your first decision was the proper one. You could not be happy here, knowing all you had abandoned, admitting you would be out of place. Eventually, your unhappiness would destroy whatever we could hope to have. I cannot allow that. I cannot be the instrument of your unhappiness. There is, in you, too much that I already cherish."

"And this?" Kirk clung tightly to the Vulcan's body. "Will we remember any of what we've had here?"

"I do not know." Spock kissed the soft, brown hair. "Perhaps what we have known here will remain in fragments of your dreams, a presentiment of what the future may hold for your other life, your other...Spock. Here, this must be enough for us."

Kirk nodded in surrender. "Enough...." His mouth found Spock's and it was eager and responsive to his own.

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Aboard the U.S.S. ENTERPRISE, Commander Spock's purposeful stride never faltered as he walked the corridor towards his quarters. After 24 straight hours of searching, he had finally permitted Mr. Scott to temporarily relieve him on the Bridge while he returned to his quarters to change his uniform. He was supposed to rest as well, but there would be no rest for him this day, and perhaps never again.

He was not aware of his unformed resolution to hesitate at the door of Kirk's cabin until he had done it. The dark head shook fiercely. He must not indulge in emotion, but there seemed little else left to him. All the crew were beginning to react to the shock of Kirk's loss. They had already searched a third of their allotted time without success and, finally, without hope. Even the Vulcan's thought discipline was becoming difficult to maintain. He shook his head again and reached a hand to his temple to steady himself. He had to believe they would find him. It could not end here. It could not end at all. Wherever his human friend was, he must be found. The Vulcan could accept no other alternative.

He made his way to his own cabin, knowing he required a few moments of meditation to clear his mind of the extraneous overload which crowded it. He knelt in the alcove which held the few Vulcan artifacts he possessed, and steeped his fingers in the meditative pose. The hardness of the deck against his bony knees, and the awkwardness of the position were dismissed immediately from his concentration. He found it more difficult to exclude other pressures that weighed upon him.

Somewhere between his former cluttered impulses and total absence of thought, a constant presence disclosed itself. It was a golden glow that he realized was now part of himself. It was an echo of a mind meld that filled him with a sense of comfort and familiarity. Each time he had experienced that link it had become more deeply ingrained in his thoughts, more completely part of his own existence. Each time the meld had been permitted there had been new revelations, new depths of spirit to explore, new facets of personality to examine, new wonders to treasure. What had just begun to be appreciated must not be lost so soon. There was so much promise for the future. Spock's mind voice spoke the name; to capture the image laughing in his mind, to sustain the thoughts, and, if possible, to reach beyond to the other end of the link. The name the mind voice called was "Jim".

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Spock.... Kirk thought as he turned to watch the Vulcan in the other room working on the last of the programming. They would be finished soon... very soon. The point of departure was nearing, and Kirk found the thought of leaving Spock, especially in his blindness, harder to bear. His decision to return to the ENTERPRISE had effectively sealed Spock's fate to his own.

He knew the Vulcan's reluctance to bond with him was partly due to the possibility that, if Kirk's return was accomplished, the strain of their separation would prove unbearable to them both.

Watchful brown eyes were on him as he turned. "Don't worry about him, Captain. He's been more contented these past two days than I've ever seen him. He's convinced that you're doing the only thing you can." She dipped her head and smiled. "I think so, too...if it means anything."

He smiled at the eyes. "It means a great deal. We could never have done it without you." He fell silent for a few moments. "Skye, may I ask you one more favor?"

"I already know what it is."

"You do?"

"Yes. You want me to look after him, don't you?"

Kirk chuckled. She was remarkable, this slender bundle of energy who had worked beside him competently and steadily as he struggled to repair the shuttlecraft, working out trajectory and propulsion problems with Spock, and performing like a 'Girl Friday' as they prepared for his return attempt. She had kept their long hours, cooked their meals, and served as a general tonic to them over the past two days. There was no doubt that she had been indispensable. Now she had leaped ahead of him once more, anticipating his most important request. "That's right. I don't want him left alone...."

Her eyes filled with a quiet respect. "You care for him very much, don't you?"

Kirk felt his insides flame, and hoped the blush did not reach his face. "Even though I know I'll be going back to him, if we're successful, it hurts me to leave him here, like this."

"No matter what the dimension, the emotion remains constant. Be comforted, Captain. He won't be alone."

"Thank you. It means more to me than you can know. I only wish we'd had more time...."

The brown eyes sparkled. Meeting Kirk and seeing him with Spock had been like a fantasy come true for her. So many unexplainable things now had been made clear. "If we're right, Captain Kirk, someday you'll have all the time you need."

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The time had come. All was prepared.

Skye was to accompany Kirk to the shuttle and see him off. Spock would remain at the laboratory to coordinate the take-off over the communications system they had rigged. He was already there, checking out systems, keeping busy to avoid the fact that he was soon to release his old friend, and new love, to an unknown fate. There had been moments, few, but not easily ignored, when Spock had doubted that he could bear to let Kirk go. The Vulcan kept telling himself that Kirk would survive, would be successful; that he was serving his captain again in the only way he could. He knew the Spock who waited aboard the great Starship need never feel the sharpened steel of grief that had driven him, half-mad, to blinded solitude. Kirk must have his chance. So must that other Spock.

Searching for a computer disk, Spock walked into the living quarters and his hand touched the medals' case with reverence and regret. The wonder might soon go out of his world. The brilliance would be missing once again. There would be a note he listened for in the celestial symphony that would never be played. He knew he should have given the medals up to the Starfleet Museum. In favor of that other Spock and his possibilities, he knew he should let go of them, and the memories that went with them. He knew he never would. They might be all he had left of Kirk or that other Spock. He opened the case and his fingers touched the Medal of Valor and lingered. This had been the last, the greatest honor, the final expression of a grateful Starfleet to one of its truest heroes. Spock felt his heart shrink a little with dread and closed the case. He could not bear his loss a second time. They had to succeed...for both their sakes.

Kirk entered the room and saw Spock struggling with the pain of parting. He had turned towards the door, unable to see his pain reflected in the captain's hazel eyes. Kirk fought for his voice against the strangling regret he felt. "Spock, if this doesn't work out...if something goes wrong...it could change so much. I'm not sure I have the right to ask you to take such a risk."

"You need not ask for what is freely given. To have you here, to have the chance to serve you again after all these years, to deepen our link, has been worth whatever it costs."

Kirk's voice sounded oddly detached to him. "The cost could be very high. I'm not sure we can pay it."

Spock shook his head at his friend's last minute doubts. "To have you safe upon your Bridge again, to restore your future...and mine...no price is too great. If something unforeseen occurs, we have done the best we can... and we have done it...together." He smiled the small shadow of joy that was his special secret. "My choice was made long ago, Jim...the first year I served with you, the first time I perceived you as my friend, the first time our minds were one." The dark head shook resolutely. "Do not forget that if we are successful, I would see you again in sunlight and shadow. I would

see your golden smile once more, my bright, my beautiful...." He hesitated, letting his words create the reunion in Kirk's thoughts. "You must try to go back, and I must help you."

The devotion was not lost on Kirk. "Spock, how can I ever repay you?" He crossed the room and, at close quarters, his vibrance hit Spock like a shock wave.

Spock's thin lips formed the words very quietly. "There is something you can do for me, Jim."

"Name it."

"If this is successful, and I believe it will be, when you get back to the ENTERPRISE of 2222.5...that Spock...." His voice softened. "He is younger, harder, than the Spock you have known here. He does not have the wisdom of my years, my pain." Spock made no effort to conceal the emotion as he said, very softly, "He is not yet aware of how much he loves you. Understand that, Jim. The Spock you have known here lies within him. Search for him. Find him. You are the only one who can. He is there, and he has need of you. Remember that. Of all that we have ever shared, carry that message in your heart. It is my truth...and yours."

Kirk's heart answered the Vulcan's. "I know that, Spock. I think I've always known that." He touched the Vulcan's arm. "I hate leaving you here... alone."

There were tears in the Vulcan's eyes. At any other time he might have explained them away. There could be no delusion with time so short. "You know where my thoughts will be. In that sense, I have not been alone for many years." He raised his hand in the Vulcan salute. "Peace and long life to you, Jim."

"And to you, my Vulcan. Live long and prosper." He took the Vulcan in his arms. "No matter what happens, Spock, I want you to know...."

Spock laid one finger on Kirk's lips to silence him. The time had come at last to say the words that he had spoken for years only in the depths of his mind and heart. "V'rlak kamta, t'hy'la." The Vulcan phrasing hung between them, charged with uncharacteristic emotion.

Kirk knew little Vulcan, but the meaning of the phrase was unmistakable. *I love you, too*, he wanted to reply, but Spock restrained him. "There is no need to speak what we have said before. Go in peace and return to that other Spock." He lifted Kirk's mouth to his and kissed him, long and deep, treasuring the touch he would not know again. "Farewell, T'hy'la." It was a vow and a prayer.

Spock released him and they found their balance once again. Something clawed at Kirk's vitals when they no longer touched. He turned away

swiftly, even though Spock couldn't see his eyes fill as he left him.

Minutes later, he waved at Skye and shouted, "Remember your promise!"

"I will. Goodbye, Captain Kirk. Good fortune!" Then she was gone, too.

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Kirk sat strapped into the shuttle's seat, hearing Spock's dispassionate countdown. "One...zero...lift off, and...good luck, Jim!" There was another Vulcan phrase as well. Kirk only recognized the word *t'hy'la*, but he smiled. The Vulcan claimed not to believe in luck.

He powered off and the craft lifted easily. He breathed a sigh of relief. She was handling well. *Bless those two! They did a splendid job on her!* He achieved orbit quickly and a regret flashed through his mind. He had not really thanked Spock.

The green light on his console flickered. He pushed the booster switch and felt the auxiliary power source they had designed kick in. This was it. According to their calculations, he had 5 seconds to the jump back into his own time. Four...three.... He had one last thought of brown eyes and red hair, and a surge of warmth along the link that never left him before space exploded.

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He opened his eyes to see McCoy's worried face above him. "Easy, Jim," came the soft, comforting drawl. "You've had quite a time of it. We lost your shuttle after that alien exploded. Spock drove the crew like a madman ...kept insistin' we'd find you. I've never been so grateful to have him right!"

Kirk smiled weakly. He felt as though a star had gone nova in his brain. McCoy was still fussing. "Chapel, inform Mr. Spock that the captain's conscious." He patted his patient's shoulder. "You were unconscious when we pulled you in with the tractor beams. Don't worry. No damage done!" He smiled and that smile had never looked so good to Kirk.

He was about to tell McCoy that when he caught sight of a lean face behind the doctor. The black hair lay precise and shining above the ebony eyes alive with light. "Spock...." He reached out and a strong, slender hand caught his.

"It pleases me to see you are recovered. You had us greatly concerned."

"Yes, I know." McCoy waved from the doorway as he left them. "Spock...." Kirk could not stop gazing into the limitless depths of the Vulcan's eyes. There was, on the edge of his memory, a nagging recall of a debt unpaid. "I want to thank you for saving my life."

"We could not lose you, Captain," Spock said simply. The pressure of his hand, still resting with Kirk's, told of other things.

Kirk spoke to the sparkling dark eyes. "Spock, have I told you how much your friendship means to me?"

One eyebrow shot up to an angle. Spock's voice had a texture like velvet. "There is no need to speak what we have said before." Kirk looked suddenly withdrawn and thoughtful. "Something troubles you?" Spock asked, his dark eyes reflecting concern.

"I've been trying to remember...." Kirk searched for the words to explain. "Been attempting to recall...what happened after I lost control of the shuttle. I only get fragments, pieces...like a dream." He looked into his friend's eyes with a guilty reluctance as he realized how much he wanted those dreams to be real. "I *think* it happened the way I remember....," he squeezed Spock's hand with a sudden urge to relive the memory. "I *hope* I'm right...but I need to be certain...."

Spock, not understanding the exact nature of Kirk's dilemma, responded, "It is distressing to you...this uncertainty?"

Kirk bit his lower lip and nodded. "Yes, most distressing. I don't think I'll ever be able to rest until it's resolved."

It was Spock's turn to nod as Kirk motioned for him to sit beside him on the bed. "Do you wish me to attempt a mind link to assist you?"

Kirk watched the angular face before him with cautious anticipation. Kirk's peace of mind demanded such a link. He was uncertain of the effects the resulting revelation might have upon Spock, but unwilling to relinquish the loving image of the Vulcan from his disjointed thoughts. Was it possible for both Spocks to be one and the same? Did he dare take the chance of forcing Spock to consider their relationship in a different light? He felt the pressure of Spock's gaze upon him. "It might prove...complicated, Spock. Do you have the time?"

Spock's eyebrows lifted elegantly above eyes whose brilliance grew with each moment they shared. "I am not due back at my station for 6 hours, 15 minutes, and 24 seconds, Jim. Do you think that will prove sufficient?" If Spock was not actually smiling, his eyes were.

Kirk, encouraged, smiled back from where he lay. "Time enough, Spock." He opened his arms, inviting Spock into his embrace. "Come here...let's not waste any more of it."

COMING TO HIS SENSES Marie Surah

Kirk jerked alert in his command chair, no longer lolling in mid-afternoon lethargy. "What?"

"I said, Spock is down here in Sickbay. He accidentally slipped down a Jefferies. Uh...."

"Damnit, Bones!" Kirk had already jumped to his feet. McCoy's hesitancy scared him even more.

"He's out cold."

"My ghod! I'll be right there." Kirk was already on his way to the turbo. "Sulu, conⁿ. Immediate report on that accident."

"Aye, si...." Sulu had no chance to complete the acknowledgement. Kirk was gone. Sulu wasted no time getting started on the requested report.

"This is the Captain: Turbo-override, emergency speed to Sickbay." Kirk was forced to cling to the control as the turbo sped through the ship. His fear-knotted stomach was left several decks behind. He was waiting at the door when the turbo rocked to a halt. He ran the few steps to Sickbay and plowed into a group of medical personnel hovering outside the small room McCoy habitually used. They quickly scattered. Kirk ignored the privacy signal and pushed into the treatment room. McCoy glanced up at him.

"Now, Jim, calm yourself." McCoy feared that he was about to acquire another patient. Kirk was pale with anxiety and panting from fear and exertion. "Spock's readings are nearly back to normal. As best I can tell, he fell and knocked the breath out of himself. Nothing is broken, so he's going to be all right."

Kirk held his breath and tiptoed closer to the exam table and his unconscious friend. Unable to control his weak trembling, he reached out to lay a shaky,

confirming hand on the barely-moving chest. The Vulcan-warmth was perceptible even through the thick material of the tunic. He swallowed hard, not yet trusting his voice. He surveyed every centimeter of the familiar face. "His jaw is bruised." Worried, Kirk looked up at McCoy.

"I know. I figure he hit one of the rungs and knocked himself out."

"A fall like that could have broken his neck." Kirk felt his stomach tighten even more.

"But it didn't! Jim-boy, you'd better sit down, you look worse than ol' Spock."

Kirk forced himself to breath deeply, to relax slightly. He studied McCoy's calm expression; the sincere blue eyes confirmed the favorable prognosis. "I'm all right now. But...."

"You were worried out of your mind for a few minutes." McCoy was well aware of just how much Jim Kirk loved his Vulcan.

"Absolutely terrified." Kirk could admit to that. He couldn't keep his eyes off Spock.

"I was afraid you'd overreact like a panicked momma with a kid who has hurt himself. Next, you'll be mad at him."

Kirk glanced at the teasing grin. "I'm afraid so. And speaking of angry mommas, what-th-hell was Spock doing up a Jefferies Tube anyway?"

"You'll have to ask him." McCoy began to fiddle with his hand scanner.

"I'll just do that! Why isn't he coming around?" Kirk couldn't help but be worried. And would be until Spock himself reassured him.

"I'm letting him come out of it naturally. Spock doesn't take kindly to having smellin' salts wafted under his snozz. And neither do you."

Kirk couldn't help but smile. Except under extreme circumstances, McCoy usually pinched his cheeks until he came around.

"Captain?"

McCoy scowled at the nurse who had dared poke a nose into his private treatment room.

"Urgent report from Mr. Sulu." The man quickly withdrew before McCoy took his head off.

"The accident report I ordered." Kirk took one last look at Spock before heading to the wall intercom.

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"...and Tech. Fisher swears he had gone to get solvent and supplies and hurried back to clean up the lube drip in Tube 7. Mr. Scott confirms that Fisher reported the seepage to him when they met at the supply cabinet. They both went tearing back to the Tube and arrived just as Mr. Spock was falling down it. They called Sickbay immediately."

Kirk sighed with partial relief. The accident had been virtually unavoidable, so he wouldn't be busting Fisher down to latrine scrubber. "Proper procedures were followed in every instance?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Scott is working in the Tube now. Apparently, there was a minor rupture in a seal."

"Those things happen. Very well, Mr. Sulu. Thank you for being so prompt with this report."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Spock is going to be all right?" Sulu couldn't help but ask again. The Bridge crew had been almost as upset as Kirk by the news of the accident.

"Doctor McCoy promises it. Our Vulcan will probably be back on the Bridge tomorrow."

"Very good news, sir. With your permission, I'll pass it on."

"You have it. Kirk out." Kirk knew that ship's grapevine would have already spread the news of the accident. The good news would travel even faster.

"He's coming around," McCoy announced from his post beside Spock.

Kirk was quick to rejoin him. He held his breath as Spock inhaled deeply, the black lashes fluttering. The slanted eyebrows twitched, then Kirk was fixed by the brown eyes. Slowly, a faint smile replaced Spock's puzzled expression.

"Jim."

Kirk swallowed hard and smiled.

"How do you feel?" McCoy glanced from the medical indicators to Spock and back again.

"I feel...." Spock took a moment to ascertain his condition. "...fine." He deliberately chose the all-purpose human response.

McCoy frowned at the fluctuating readings and tapped at the dials. He glanced again at Spock and discovered that Kirk was hovering over his patient, tenderly clasping the long hand. McCoy smiled to himself and flicked off the instruments.

"Bones?" Kirk and Spock spoke simultaneously.

"The man says he's fine. And, as far as I can tell, he is. Do you remember tumbling down that Jefferies Tube?"

"I...." Spock's forehead creased in concentration. He shrugged. "Not a particularly memorable event."

Kirk could not keep silent a moment longer. "What-the-devil were you doing in there?"

"I am the First Officer of this vessel; is it not my duty to be...everywhere?" Spock sat up and, when no difficulties were experienced, he slid to his feet. If he could only escape Sickbay....

McCoy grinned. "He's got you there, Jim."

"Indeed, Bones. And now, duty...."

"Hold it!" McCoy hurried around the table, ready to forcibly restrain his impatient patient. "You took a bad fall and you're not going back on duty today. Besides, shift is almost over. I'm ordering you to rest in your quarters. And, Jim, you go along with him to see that he does."

"I will." Kirk was more than agreeable to those orders. And, apparently, so was Spock as he received another faint smile.

"I'll drop in later to check on you. Now, shoo!" McCoy escorted the two to the exit and turned back to tidy the room.

Some while later, his memory of the recovery scene caused him to rush to Spock's quarters.

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Spock waited until Kirk had entered, then followed him into his quarters. "A brandy?" he strode to the drinks cabinet.

Kirk debated with himself only a moment. He wasn't going back on duty. "A shot might steady my nerves. I was worried about you." He was not ashamed of the admission.

Spock poured the drinks and served Kirk's. "I regret causing you worry. To my T'hy'la." Spock touched their glasses and upended his drink. His smile faded as Kirk stared at him. "Is something wrong?"

Kirk had never seen Spock gulp a drink. And Spock had rarely called him T'hy'la. He wasn't even sure what the Vulcan word meant. "I...uh...no, nothing is wrong." Kirk downed his own drink and set his glass beside Spock's. "Would you like to res...."

Spock advanced on his t'hy'la and took both hands in his. "Since we are here, and perhaps, you feel as I do...." Spock leaned down and kissed the soft lips. He licked at the faint tang of brandy and elicited a sudden gasp from

his sweet human. Spock let his libido take over.

"Spock!" Kirk bit off his yelp of surprise and protest. "What's got...." Before he could continue, a startlingly hot mouth fastened to his. He was kissed like he'd never been kissed before! He almost forgot to struggle against the superior strength.

Eventually, Spock allowed the squirming man to draw back -- both desperate for air. He smiled at the glittering-bright eyes and caressed the soft brown hair. No one was as handsome, as desirable as his lover. He tightened a possessive arm around that cherished lover.

"Spock?" Kirk paused to clear the hoarseness from his voice. "What's gotten into you? I mean...this...lovemaking to me. You've never done this before. I never dreamed that you would want to. I mean, I might...." Kirk shut up before he revealed entirely too much of his own hopes and dreams. "Are you sure you're all right? You took quite a thump." Kirk suddenly recalled a passage from a mandatory Academy course. "My ghods! You must be having delusions! Maybe amnesia!" Kirk was already in shock and not entirely certain that he was pleased with his muddled diagnosis.

Spock studied the stunned expression. Jim was capable of a surprisingly realistic performance. "You wish me to believe that I have amnesia? That we are not lovers?" Spock squeezed Kirk significantly.

"Lover?" Kirk squeaked. "How could...."

"Lovers for some two years now. And, recently, we have discussed poor Bones' need since his beloved Melanie departed...."

Kirk's mouth gaped. "Two...? Bones...?"

"I see. You and the good doctor have concocted yet another elaborate prank for your entertainment. At my expense." Spock vividly recalled the incident when Kirk, McCoy and the entire Bridge crew had conspired to convince him that Starbase 21 was actually Starbase 12. Jim had gleefully accused him of being unable to find his own ass with both hands. Spock slid his hands down to Jim's magnificently-rounded buttocks. He had no trouble whatsoever finding that!

"P-p-prank?" Kirk felt a squeeze.

"Your forté." Spock also recalled an embarrassing incident at a shore leave hotel. Kirk had implied to the haughty desk clerk that Spock was a just-met 'paid companion'. And, as their luggage had been lost....

Kirk pushed against the wiry shoulders. Breaking Spock's determined grip was impossible.

"Indeed. You and Bones are devious practical jokers. However, as Mr. Scott is so fond of quoting: 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.'"

Kirk was amazed at the uncanny imitation of Scott's brogue. He was also surprised to feel a hot stirring, a hardening in the vicinity of Spock's.... He pushed harder, but the arms simply held firm. He had no intention of going so far as to actually strike Spock to gain his release. That would be unforgivably brutal. But it would also be inexcusable to allow Spock to continue and, later, when he remembered.... Kirk was momentarily horrified. Spock would die of embarrassment if -- when he remembered. "This is no prank!"

Spock leaned down to kiss the moist, pink lips again.

Kirk held his mouth perfectly stiff, unresponsive.

Spock eased back and chuckled. "You are a superb actor. And at the moment, your control is admirable. However, you are just as horny as I. Otherwise, you would not have eagerly accompanied me here...during duty shift. We really must cease these mid-afternoon trysts. Someday."

Kirk was not just surprised by that accusation, he was shocked out of his shoes. Consequently, his guard fell. And Spock knew how to take advantage of that.

Spock leaned down to the parted lips and employed his special brand of Vulcan-magic. He kissed Jim Kirk until their lips were stinging sweetly and the long, sandy/blond lashes fluttered closed. Spock smiled to himself, smugly aware that he was 'getting to' Kirk now. The silly joke was over.

Spock lifted his lover and deposited him on the narrow bed. In moments, his expertise at removing Kirk's uniform produced the desired results. Jim lay naked before him, pink/tan flesh glistening with perspiration. Spock was swiftly out of his own garments and on the bed with his panting lover.

Kirk groaned as the hot hands caressed his thighs and slowly slid upward. "Oh, ghod! I'm only human, I can't help it!"

"You are most beautiful." Spock sighed as his fingertips contacted contracting testicles. The large cock pulsed and swelled even more. Spock licked his lips in preparation.

"Oh, ghod...." Kirk had to close his eyes. Spock was going to suck him! He froze when hot breath tickled him. And moaned uncontrollably when the wet tongue flicked the head of his penis. He had to look.

Spock waited until Kirk's eyes opened wide. Then, he supported the heavy organ between both hands and licked wetly at the satin head. Kirk had not yet begun to seep pre-ejaculate lubrication. But he would soon and there would be something good to taste. Spock set about sucking it out of him.

"I can't believe this!" Kirk murmured repeatedly to himself. But his uncontrollable body believed. He arched up to the sucking lips, the hot wetness of Spock's mouth. Spock continued the expert sucking, the well-practiced caresses on his chest and legs. And in between.

Spock urged the legs farther apart and Kirk sprawled in passionate cooperation. Spock continued to tongue and suck hard on the spongy head; to stroke the long shaft. He gently pinched the tiny buds of nipples and caressed down to the curly pubic hair -- now damp from his breathing. The almost-hairless inner thighs opened wide to his touch and, with careful fingers, Spock delved into the tight crevice. Kirk was small, with very narrow hips. But not restrictively so. Spock moaned, excited by the thought of burying himself in his lover. He eased off the glistening penis and moved lower....

Kirk gasped and could not stop himself from arching up, flaunting his erection in Spock's face, offering it, again. Silently begging to be sucked. When the tantalizing mouth did not return immediately, Kirk groped for the pointed ears, with every intention of dragging Spock back to him.

Spock nipped a warning on the plump testicles and slid lower in the bed. He pushed Kirk's thighs apart and up, opening the shadowed crevice -- revealing the rosy/brown pucker. He bent to tongue, rim.... He always kissed Jim there before lubricating him -- if necessary -- and plunging into....

"Spock! Oh, my ghod!" Kirk slapped his hand over his own mouth to stifle an ecstatic groan. Of all the lovers he had ever had, no one was as good as... Spock! Kirk was shocked all over again.

Kirk was groaning and wriggling all over the bed by the time Spock had finished with that portion of his 'program'. Both were achingly hard, nearly stimulated to orgasm by the intense foreplay. Spock crawled up between the wide-spread legs and pulled Kirk's hips up this thighs. He had to force his own erection down to the saliva-wet entrance. Kirk was very wet and open -- and ready for him.

"Oh, yes! Yes! I want you so much."

Spock did not avail himself of the opportunity to tease -- he saved his breath for something more important. He positioned his rampant penis and nudged. Kirk spasmed excitedly. He pushed harder; began to enter, pausing between each assault -- and finally sank to the hilt.

Kirk felt the hot intruder with every fiber of his being. It was unbelievable that Spock could.... He grunted as the piston began to pump deeply into him. The twinges of pain had faded surprisingly quickly as he became accustomed to the bulk. Soon and quite without conscious intentions, his own body started to reciprocate. Kirk discovered that he liked being fucked! He liked it a lot. At least, liked it the way Spock did it. Spock! From his constricted position, Kirk dared to peek down at their joining. The green flesh was appearing, then disappearing. Inside him!

"Oh, ghod!" Kirk threw his head back and gave himself up to the hot loving.

Spock pumped, plunged and plowed Kirk's body like he was undulating earth. And it was wildly exciting. To both.

"Jim! Oh, my T'hy'la!" Spock moaned and thrust vigorously. Amazingly,

Jim was trying desperately to match him. Spock reached down to the bobbing penis and, at his touch, it throbbed strongly. Kirk gasped out a warning/encouragement. Spock stroked and pumped, stimulating them both to orgasm. It did not take long.

They came. Kirk first -- then Spock. Panting, sweating, clutching hard to each other's beloved flesh.

Spock eased from the tight sheath and lowered the trembling legs. He fell into the open arms. Kirk hugged him tightly, murmuring unintelligibly into his ear -- inadvertently blowing into the sensitive canal. Spock shivered -- and not from irritation.

"Ghod, I love you so much." Kirk hugged hard and rubbed his sweaty lips into Spock's equally wet cheek.

The broad bands of Kirk's muscular arms enclosed Spock in the loving embrace. Unfortunately, they also restricted his air intake. "I love you, also." Spock wheezed and the tight grip relented slightly. But Kirk did not release him. And he did not want to be free. He propped on his elbows to lean down to the succulent lips.

They kissed tenderly, rubbing gentle kisses into each others' mouth.

"I could kiss you forever," Kirk murmured, unaware of his babbling.

"You are perfectly welcome to do so."

Kirk chuckled, relaxed and very sexually satisfied. He had never felt so satiated, so completely loved. And then he remembered.

Spock felt the tension under him. "I am heavy on you. Also, we are both extremely wet." Spock never mentioned the other messiness. Lovemaking of almost every kind was naturally messy.

Kirk swallowed hard, but said nothing. He avoided looking at Spock as the lean body left his. Despite the high heat of the Vulcan's quarters, Kirk felt a wet chill.

"As usual, you may use the facilities first." Spock laid a small towel across his hips.

Kirk quit the wrecked bed in a hurry. He barely paused to snatch up a handful of clothes. He dumped everything on the bathroom floor and dived into the cubicle.

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During the lengthy shower, Kirk lectured himself sternly. And felt ashamed at his lack of control. But there was some justification for his acquiescence.

He could not have brutally refused Spock and hurt him deliberately. Somehow, when Spock was himself again, they would work it out. He had to believe that.

When Kirk emerged from the shower, he discovered that, unwittingly, he had managed to grab garments that belonged solely to Spock. He debated wrapping a towel around his hips, then thought how foolish he would feel. Especially after their wild and surprisingly uninhibited lovemaking. He finger-combed his hair, plastering a confident grin on his face and rejoined Spock.

"Your turn. Then, we'll talk."

Spock rose from the bed, kissed Kirk in passing, and proceeded on into the head.

Kirk soon discovered that Spock had discarded, or otherwise, disposed of both uniforms. Uneasy, he sat down on the edge of the bed to think. But thinking did no good. He forced himself to relax.

Spock hurriedly, but thoroughly showered. He never liked to keep Jim waiting. And Jim wished to talk to him about something. Or, perhaps, Jim wished to make love again. Spock finished in the bath and just in case, secured more towels. He entered the bedroom and found Kirk sitting on the bed, lost in thought. He set the towels on the headboard shelf and moved around the bed to seat himself beside his pensive companion.

Kirk sighed, aware that Spock was looking quizzically at him. He could find no way to convince Spock that they were not long-time lovers and merely fellow officers. Or had been until that day.

"T'hy'la?" Spock caressed the smooth shoulder with a feather-light touch.

Kirk shivered, helplessly responding to Spock's touch. How could he give up such love? "What does that mean...precisely?"

"Friend, brother, lover. You are all to me."

Kirk's heart overflowed with emotions.

"Rest now." Spock urged Kirk back onto the bed, easily lifting him into a more comfortable position. Spock eased onto the remaining space -- with parts of him hanging precariously over the edge.

Seemingly simultaneously, Spock's unlocked door slid open and closed; McCoy bellowed "Spock!"; Kirk jumped in surprise; startled, Spock flinched, flailed and fell off the bed. He landed with a respectable thud.

"Bones?" Kirk yelped and, with feet entangled in bedcovers, he crawled fast to the edge of the bed. He peered over at the motionless Vulcan. "Oh, my ghod! He's knocked himself out again."

"Jim! What the hell are you...." McCoy skidded to a stop, finally noticing

the naked Vulcan on the floor instead of staring at the naked human kneeling on the bed. He dropped to his knees beside Spock and felt for the carotid. The thrum of fast Vulcan pulse reassured him. He whipped out his ever-ready scanner and studied the readouts. It told him plenty! He eyed Kirk's anxious expression. And couldn't help but notice the love-marks on his chest and...thighs?! Although no one had to tell him what had been going on, he wanted to hear it from the horse's mouth. "What's been happening here?"

"Nevermind that! How is he?" Kirk had been on tenterhooks waiting the diagnosis.

"Hit his head and he's out again. Seems to be becoming a bad habit. He's going to be all right. You wouldn't believe how many crewmen fall out of these narrow little beds."

"You said he was all right the last time. Listen, Bones. Spock had got amnesia or delusions or something like that. He thought -- thinks -- whatever, that we...he and I...are lovers!"

"You are. At least, now you are. Are you sure you didn't...."

"No! I didn't take advantage of him. I didn't instigate this!" Kirk jumped from the bed, wishing he had some clothes. He grabbed a towel and wrapped his naked hips. "If you can't believe me...."

McCoy indicated Spock and they carefully lifted him to the bed. "I don't know what to think. I should have noticed that he wasn't quite himself before he left Sickbay. I was just so dad-blamed relieved that he wasn't broken up from the fall."

"So was I. And, he seemed perfectly all right."

"But he wasn't. And I wasn't very observant. He was vague about answering my questions and he called me Bones several times. And that in itself is highly unusual. If anything, he might call me Leonard."

Kirk paused to recall the awakening in Sickbay. "He was...atypically familiar with both of us."

"Downright intimate for Spock. He smiled several times -- mostly at you. And he let you touch him without the usual controlled cringe."

Unaware of his reaction, Kirk smiled fondly. He liked Spock's touches. He quickly became aware that McCoy was studying him as much as his patient. "What do you think will happen now?"

"You mean, will he be his 'old self' when he wakes up? I don't know. Frankly, I don't know enough about Vulcan mental problems to make an educated guess."

"Ghod, I wish...." Kirk bit his lip and tore his gaze from the beloved countenance.

"The seduction went easily," McCoy mused.

Kirk blushed furiously. "He seduced me. I couldn't help myself." Kirk straightened his slumped shoulders. "I love him."

"I'd say he feels the same about you. It's very probable, he's dreamed or fantasized these events hundreds of times. His subconscious finally saw a chance and took him over."

"Then, his emotions are real? He does...love me, want me?"

McCoy's heart twinged at the naked longing in the big eyes. He could not withhold a reassurance. "That's probably the case."

Kirk sighed, unhappy with the speculations. "It's so strange that Spock would...."

"Would have such a 'weakness'? All the years of repression could have caught up with him. It happens to stressed humans all the time and in various ways. That's why I recommend letting loose periodically -- getting it out of your system."

"Maybe, he did get it -- me out of his system." Kirk couldn't meet McCoy's eyes. "What do we -- I do now?"

"There are several ways to react. One: You put some clothes on and we cover Spock and pretend nothing happened. If he's back to normal, he'll think he dreamed the whole thing. But, you'll know it really happened. And I suspect you won't be able to handle that. The big 'what if' will gnaw at you. Almost certainly, sooner or later, you'll try something."

Kirk felt an embarrassed flush heat his entire body. He almost found the courage to invade Spock's closet and find something to cover himself.

"Second: We leave everything just the way it is and shock him -- force him to acknowledge this reality. After all, actions have spoken louder than words."

"Words, yeah. I kept trying to convince Spock that we weren't -- involved, but he believed we were pulling some sort of joke. Another prank, he called it."

"'We'?" McCoy peered down into the relaxed face. The long nose flared as if in Vulcan slumber.

"You and I. Apparently, we had pulled a couple of corks that really had him going. And he was dead-set on not letting me get away with anything else."

"In his mind, he has magnified our teasing. But, I think he knows we do it with affection." McCoy reached down to smooth the perfect bangs.

Kirk watched what was so obviously a loving caress. It brought a smile to his lips. "I haven't told you everything. He...mentioned you. Apparently,

he's got some...interesting ideas about you, too."

McCoy kept his hand where it was. "You mean, besides stringin' me up?"

"Far from it."

"Like what?"

Kirk tried to recall the exact words. "Do you happen to know someone named Melanie? I mean, are you or were you close?"

McCoy turned to Kirk, his mouth agape in surprise. "I'll be damned! She just came aboard with the last batch of transferees. I've been thinking about her. She's blond and pretty-as-a-picture."

"You haven't been dating her?"

"Nope. But I have thought about asking her. She seems to be interested in me, too."

Kirk shook his head in puzzlement. "I wonder how Spock knew about her and you? He couldn't have just picked her name out of thin air. He must have seen you talking to her and sensed your interest."

"Maybe." McCoy settled himself on the bed beside Spock.

Deep in thought, Kirk eased down onto the other side.

"What about me?" McCoy prompted.

"Spock seemed to think it would be...comforting to you, if we...we...took you to bed with us." Kirk shrugged and eyed McCoy's shocked blue eyes. "Well, don't look that way! It was his idea."

"Ghod-a-mighty! This Vulcan certainly is screwed up!"

"I don't think so." Kirk didn't mention his own shock at the idea, despite Spock's obvious compassionate intention.

"You wouldn't!"

"He loves both of us." Kirk smiled down at the serene face. He was tempted to rest his hand on the hairy chest. His fingers itched to stroke, caress. He snatched his hand back -- in the very act of touching.

"And you love him." It was not a question.

"I'm afraid so." Kirk sighed and studied his own exposed knee. "It's up to me to decide, isn't it?"

"Yep."

"I can't take advantage of him. If he wakes and I blatantly tell him.... I can't do that to him. I guess I'll just have to pretend and keep on hoping."

"That's the more ethical and likely the most painful way, Jim."

"I can handle it. Contrary to popular belief, a captain gets less of what he wants than any crewman." Kirk studied each familiar feature, memorizing them for later. He got up to find his uniform. It was hung neatly in Spock's perfectly-arranged closet. He disturbed nothing.

Kirk was barely dressed when Spock mumbled and showed signs of waking. McCoy quickly tucked a blanket over Spock's nakedness and re-seated himself on the bed. Kirk tidied the room and glanced about to be certain everything was as usual. He stood by the bedside, barely breathing.

Quickly impatient, McCoy roughly shook the limp Vulcan. "Hey! Wake up, Spock!"

And Spock did. Suddenly. He flailed at the entangling cover and, incidentally, McCoy.

"Hey! You trying to fly, boy?" McCoy barely restrained Spock while trying to retain the sheet.

Fully awakened by the familiar grumbling, Spock stilled. "I was falling...."

"Down the Tube?" McCoy supplied.

Spock instantly brought a hand up to his sore jaw. Then he recognized his surroundings. "I am in my quarters."

"You state the obvious," McCoy mimicked. He eyed Kirk worriedly.

"You're here...to recover." Kirk stepped into Spock's line of sight.

"Jim?" Spock frowned in concentration. A disturbing memory was nagging at him.

Kirk eased onto the edge of the bed, trying to smile. "How are you feeling?"

Spock took several seconds to determine his physical condition. "I am bruised in several locations. My back is fatigued. And I feel...strangely enervated."

Kirk gulped and shot a look of alarm at McCoy. The doctor's inscrutable expression offered no help. "Injuries from the fall you took," Kirk mumbled.

"Perhaps. Why am I unclothed?" Spock had become acutely aware of his nakedness.

"I don't put my patients to bed with clothes on. Restricts circulation. Besides, we don't know where you keep your dang P.J.s."

"I do not sleep in pajamas. As you stated, excessive clothing restricts

circulation and breathing. However, I do not usually sleep on top of rumpled bedcovers."

"You weigh a ton, Spock-boy. We did the best we could. Uh...do you remember what happened?"

"Of course. During routine inspection, I slipped on some viscous substance and fell down Tube 7. I remember striking something with my jaw and that is all."

Kirk swallowed hard and found it necessary to stare at the ornate chest on the headboard. He was both relieved and disappointed.

"There is also...a vague intermittent memory, a sensation not altogether unpleasant...." Spock shut up abruptly.

Kirk froze and swallowed hard again. He almost lost his resolve. He got to his feet and moved away from the bed. Spock was much too tempting. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"I believe so, Captain."

"Good. Then, I'll see you later." Kirk knew he had to get out. Now.

"I'll be right over, Jim," McCoy called as Kirk headed out the door, almost at a run.

"The Captain seems -- disturbed by something.

McCoy balefully eyed that 'something'. He bit his lip, tempted to fill Spock in on everything right then. Instead, he ran the scanner from head to toe, twice. "He was very worried. But, this time, looks like you're back to normal. Now get some rest. I'll look in on you later. Do you need anything?" McCoy fussed with the pillow in his usual bedside manner.

"No, thank you, Doctor. Perhaps, rest is best at the moment." Spock was swiftly becoming aware that all was not normal with his two friends.

McCoy dimmed the lighting and glanced at Spock one last time. "Rest," he ordered and headed for the door.

Spock inhaled deeply in relaxation, relieved to be alone -- to think without their disturbed emotional auras distracting him. He idly rubbed his bruised jaw and over tender, over-sensitive lips. Strange, his lips were almost chafed? The softness of his own fingerpads was very reminiscent of Jim's sweet, soft lips.... Spock bolted upright, his heart thrumming wildly. Dreams, secret fantasies and stark reality suddenly merged shockingly. Spock collapsed back on the bed and pulled the cover over his head.

In the stifling darkness, he relived every moment of the past hours. At the end, he made several well-considered decisions that would forever alter the course of his life. If he had courage....

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Kirk paced the confines of his office, trying to work off his frustrations. "Are you sure it wouldn't be best to tell him what he did? I mean, he might... repeat that episode someday."

"Are you hoping he will -- or won't?"

"I don't want it again if he doesn't remember -- isn't even aware of what he's doing. But...."

"But, you'd fall into his arms in a minute if he even looked at you."

"I suppose so. I'm a push-over, Bones. Everybody knows that."

"Nope. Now you're a push-over just for Spock."

Kirk shrugged and conceded the point. "Still, it doesn't seem fair to withhold the knowledge of his own actions from him. But, it seems just as cruel to reveal it."

"The horns of the dilemma, Jim. It's my medical recommendation to wait it out for a few days. Spock is amazingly perceptive and he just might come out with all this on his own. Since we're on patrol and nothing urgent is up, we can afford to wait and see."

Kirk plopped into his chair and propped his feet on the desk. "If I can stand the tension. It'll be like waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"Yeah. Ghod, I'm exhausted already. Worrying over Spock and you is worse than eighteen hours in surgery. I'm goin' to get a bite to eat, then, take a nap. I'll drop by again after I've checked on Spock." McCoy labored to his feet, but paused at the door. "You could use a nap, too. At least, stay off your feet."

Kirk smiled and nodded. "I'll consider your recommendation, Doctor." McCoy's scowl demanded a reassurance. "I promise, I'll rest." Kirk was discovering that his own tension-fatigue probably matched McCoy's. "Later," he reminded as McCoy went out the door.

Alone, Kirk sighed loudly, looked around his spartan office and remembered his duty. He called the Bridge and was assured that everything was operating smoothly -- routine prevailed. He decided to follow McCoy's advice and stretched out on the bed. He closed his eyes, only to have them pop open again. He rested his wrist across his forehead to force the lids to stay closed. His imagination enhanced memory immediately took advantage and began to replay and augment Spock's lovemaking. Kirk could almost feel the hot penis moving inside him. The warmth of the big hands -- the gentle caresses on his legs, testicles, nipples.... Kirk groaned and rolled onto his side. He wasn't surprised to feel a definite bulge bunching his tight trousers. "Damn!"

Sex was not plentiful. Especially good sex. And on board ship. "It wasn't

sex with Spock. That was making love," he murmured, and was suddenly aware of speaking aloud. "Damn, now I'm talking to myself." Kirk curled into a ball and determinedly closed his eyes, intent on forcing himself to sleep. Eventually, he did.

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Spock paused at the captain's door, his shaking hand outstretched almost far enough to register his presence on the scanner. His arm fell weakly and he nervously wrung his damp hands. Feet shuffled anxiously, but he controlled the urge to turn and flee back into his own quarters. "Courage," he murmured to himself. And reinforced his resolve with the positive image of Kirk smiling up at him, whispering words of love. "I want his love. I need him." Spock told himself and raised his shaky hand, again. Quickly, before he could change his mind, he palmed the sensor. And waited an eternity, frozen in front of the door to his future....

At the sound of the buzzer, Kirk snapped awake and alert. "Come," he ordered, already sitting up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He got to his feet, aware of a slight soreness and a stiffness in his own back. The unaccustomed lovemaking, no doubt. He tugged down his tunic and stepped into the office. Only to be shocked by a rigid Vulcan confronting him by the desk. For a panicked moment, Kirk had no idea how to respond. "Uh...hi. Feeling better?" He forced a feeble smile.

Spock licked his desert-dry lips. "I am well. Thank you."

"I'm relieved. A serious injury...."

"My health is not what I wish to discuss." Spock swallowed hard, with no intention of allowing himself or Kirk to deviate from the important topic.

Kirk stared into the unnaturally bright eyes. He knew his Vulcan well and had no trouble reading him now. "You've remembered! Oh, my ghod!" Kirk felt his strength draining away.

Spock could only nod. He watched Kirk's vivid coloring deepen even more. Jim had become flushed and was breathing slightly faster than normal at sight of him.

"Everything?" Kirk squeaked. He leaned against the desk to support his jelly-knees.

"Everything," Spock confirmed and noted that his own voice was reaching into the higher registers. Strangely, Vulcan calm and control were not being asserted now. The human in him was needed to deal with emotional situations. The Vulcan stepped back and let him get on with it. "Every detail. Every word. Every emotion."

The admission of emotion sent Kirk into a warp maneuver tail-spin. "I... I...."

Spock took pity on his babbling commander. "You were uncommonly

compassionate to me."

Kirk was beyond speech now. "Huh?"

"I am assuming, had anyone else attempted...rape upon your person, you would have resisted vigorously and effectively. I believe I once overheard you mention a knee judiciously employed...."

"Oh, my ghod!"

"Since you did not abruptly terminate...my attempt, I am assuming that you... did not find me unduly distasteful." Spock paused to lick his lips again. He was rambling and losing the thread of his speech. It was difficult to speak at all. His courage seemed to be deserting him.

Kirk forced control on himself. Instead of panicking like a blushing school girl, he should be responding to Spock's efforts in a sincere, mature manner. He could see that Spock was struggling to reveal his thoughts and emotions.

"However, if I am mistaken...." Spock glanced at the door, wishing he were still outside re-revising the impossible speech. Feet shuffled nervously.

Kirk suddenly panicked in a different direction -- fearing that Spock might leave. "I love you!" He blurted the only sure thing in his addled head.

Spock inhaled impossibly deep. Nervous anxiety, emotional insecurities and doubts were expelled with the pent breath. "You are very compassionate to me."

"I...I didn't mean to blab it out like that." Kirk straightened proudly. "But I do mean it."

"I believe you. However, my statement stands. You have compassionately 'put me out of my misery'."

Kirk chuckled weakly and advanced toward his beautiful Vulcan. *All mine, now!* he exulted. "Can you do the same for me?"

Spock studied the cocky tilt of the magnificent head, the teasing sparkle in the hazel eyes. He rose to the challenge. It seemed he had already won Jim Kirk. But, keeping him was another matter. "If you require it."

"I think I do. But...." Kirk reached to enclose the surprisingly damp hands in his and slowly drew Spock closer.

"But?" Spock was willing to give Kirk free rein.

"I think I'd rather be here...." Kirk placed the long arms around him and smiled when Spock took over the embrace. He pressed close for a moment, then leaned back to look up at the melting brown eyes. "...here in your arms when you tell me. For the record this time."

"Indeed! You intend to...hold me to this declaration?" Spock tightened

his embrace. Kirk's compact body was maddeningly distracting.

"How does forever sound to you?"

"Almost long enough. Jim?"

Kirk was getting lost in the loving eyes. "Um?" The warming of their pressed groins was beginning to heat his blood. And Spock's.

"I say this in full control of all my faculties: I love you, Jim. I have loved you for...perhaps forever. And I...want you." Spock knew his aroused body was already demonstrating his passion. Still, it took courage to voice his desires.

"Oh, ghod, that was the most beautiful speech I've ever heard." Kirk squirmed, barely controlling the urge to undulate against Spock. He suddenly wondered why he could not. Surely, they were long past the 'first-time' awkwardness. "Are you going to be my lover?"

"I will strive to be whatever you wish. Whenever you wish." Spock calculated the odds on Kirk's next request.

"Then, now. I need my lover now." Kirk tilted his head, silently begging for a lover's kiss. Caresses. Loving.

Spock bent to the succulent, parted lips. Calling upon the fantasized experiences of hundreds of love-kisses, he seared his lips to Jim's. Both gasped in excited reaction.

"Oh, Spock...." Kirk wrapped his arms around Spock's neck, supporting his weak knees. "Take me to bed."

"This instant." Despite his own watery-weak knees, Spock swung Kirk into his arms and strode toward the bedroom.

"Almost like last time." Kirk nuzzled the hot skin over the prominent neck vein.

"Better. For this is reality."

"Better, yes. But your fantasy -- delusion was incredibly exciting. And revealingly informative to me. I know for certain that you are going to be a fantastic lover."

"Indeed?" Spock propped a foot and spared a hand to fling the cover off the narrow bed. He carefully lowered his precious burden.

"You've already proved it." Kirk drew Spock down to lie beside him. Their close embrace already felt comfortable and natural.

"So?" Spock lightly traced the enticing round ear.

"So, what?"

"I am anticipating discovering if your reputation is accurate."

"Why, you...!"

"I, too, would like to be assured that I have acquired a wonderful lover."

Kirk smiled slyly and reached for the tunic fastener. "You'll just have to wait and see, won't you?" Hands moved lower and got very busy.

"Indeed. Indeed!" Spock gasped fervently.

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"Jim! Spock's not in his...." McCoy careened through the empty office and skidded to a halt in Kirk's very occupied bedroom just in time to see a pink ass whirl and roll off the skimpy bed. Kirk literally bounced when he hit the deck.

"Oof! Ouch!" Kirk sat up promptly, rubbing his bumped head.

"Chalk up another one," McCoy panted and then gaped as a tossed-headed Vulcan popped up in Kirk's bed. "Spock!?"

"Good evening, Doctor," Spock greeted civilly. But his main interest was Kirk's apparently uninjured body. "Are you all right, Jim?"

"Hit my head," Kirk murmured, wincing and rubbing more carefully.

"Let me have a look at it." McCoy fingered the not-yet bruised area, using the moment to compose himself. "Nothing busted on this hard head."

"There's a big lump there!" Kirk caught McCoy's finger to direct it to the correct location.

"Naw, there ain't. Not yet," McCoy insisted. He caught Kirk's hand and pulled him up, noticing several new love marks. Sidelong, he eyed Spock's hairy chest. The long neck was sporting two vivid-green hickeys! McCoy cleared his throat and stepped away from the rumpled bed. He bounced on his toes while thinking of a typical comment. "Well, I don't suppose anybody has to tell me what's been going on."

Kirk sat on the edge of the bed and glanced at his lover. "Spock's becoming... been...coming to his senses." Kirk shrugged, pretty pleased with that explanation.

"I see." And McCoy did see. Spock had come to Jim. Not the other way round. Kirk's smiling face displayed his happiness. Jim was in love. And Spock looked calm and serene. But there was something intriguing about the

softness in the brown eyes. McCoy smiled to himself. He recognized a 'just-fucked' look when he saw one.

"It just happened, Bones. Can you be happy for us?"

"Sure, I can, Jim-boy. I am! I 'spect ol' Spock is just what you need. And you always were what he needed."

"Most perceptive, Doctor. May I inquire why you were shouting my name when you arrived?" Spock was not about to complain of McCoy's barging into Jim's quarters.

"I went in to check on you and I got a little upset when you weren't there. I didn't know what you might have done."

"Nothing foolish, I assure you."

Kirk smiled proudly at his lover.

"I regret causing you alarm."

"Think nothing of it. I'm glad everything is all right. So... 'scuse my intrusion." McCoy edged toward the door.

"Good night, Doctor." Spock turned his attention to straightening the wrecked bed -- although he had no intention of vacating it.

"Night, Bones. See you in the morning." Kirk significantly arched a brow.

"Night, Spock, Jim. Uh, Jim? You know these doors do have locks!" McCoy made his escape. And made a mental note to lock his own door -- if he were lucky enough to lure pretty Melanie to his parlor.

Kirk settled into bed, smiling when Spock's head came to rest on his shoulder. They sighed in unison. "Jim? Perhaps you should lock the door."

"Why? McCoy's the only one who would dare charge in here unannounced."

"There is your yeoman. It is a rather early hour for bed," Spock reminded.

"She wouldn't." Kirk recalled several unintentional intrusions when she had brought reports to his quarters.

"Captain Kirk! Mister Spock!"

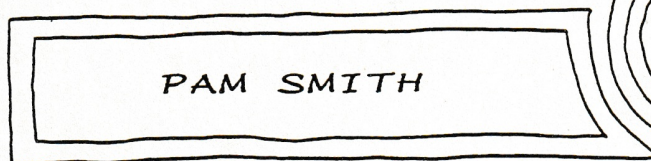
Startled by the shocked voice, Kirk whirled -- discovered himself in mid-air and falling.

"Not again!" he yelped, just as he hit the deck.

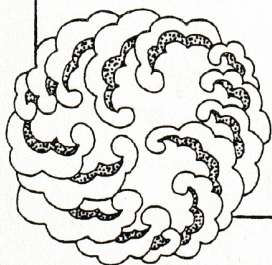
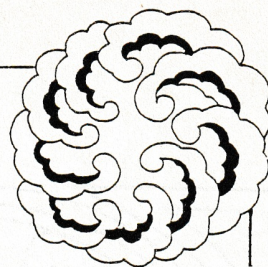
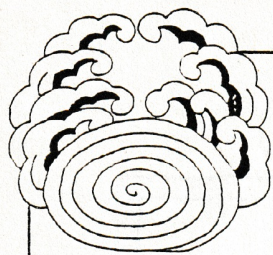


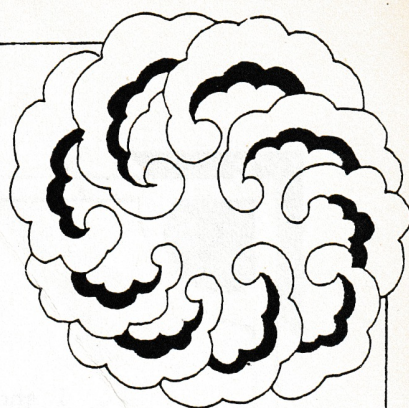
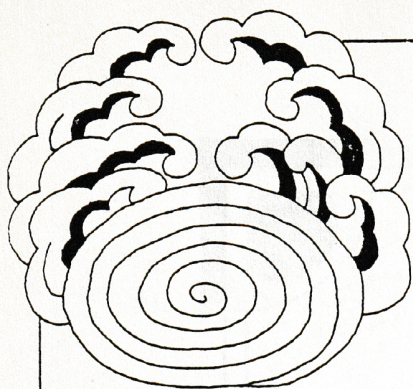
JADE

Diamonds are more fitting for my personality.
Everyone says so. they fit my lifestyle;
adventure, excitement, danger and daring
four adjectives that are so often applied to me.
A sparkling stone in a medal,
matching the glint in my eye.
And yet diamonds are not my stone,
no, I yearn for the soft luxury
of delicately shaded rock,
stroked smooth by my hand.
Crystallised coal isn't my touchstone,
it's too hard, too ungiving.
I prefer the gem of nephrite
I found amongst the glitter of the stars.



PAM SMITH

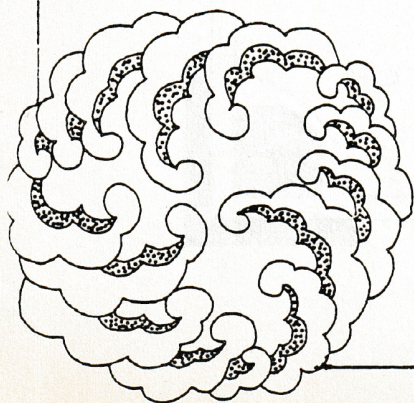




A MOTIONLESS ARMY

Since you left
I gaze often at the constant sea
stretching over lime rocks.
I think of your
unselfish beauty,
the heat of your skin
like a summer wind.
The month of June
is hardest without you.
The air falls heavy with
your tart scent
and the crowded beach
is even more lonely
than empty sands.
I cannot go out anymore
or talk to friends.
My commitment to you
precludes idle enjoyment
of anything without you.
Our chess set remains
untouched by knowing hands.
I stand by the board,
one more man
in a motionless army
of love.

Natasha Solten



CRUISING

I should not have come.
Shoreleave...
Shoreleave bars...
And you are on the prowl....

I watch your face
Your changing eyes flickering over each newcomer
Searching, judging, discarding every possibility.
You read their souls with practiced ease
Looking beyond the overt invitation in their eyes.
You have not seen me yet,
Though I am fascinated by your ritual.
I hide behind a mask of friendship
Unwilling to be noticed.
I could not bear your evaluation,
I could not survive your disdain.
Then, when I am most secure in my invisibility,
Certain that I can escape the basilisk stare,
You turn to me as if for the first time.
My heart pauses --
Frozen by your intensity.
I dare not breathe lest I become imperfect.
I remain
Trapped in a moment of mortality
Awaiting your smile.

TERE ANN RODERICK

THE AIR IS THE AIR

Vivian Gates

(This last story written by Vivian Gates was originally printed as a supplement of Act Five, Scene Two and appears here in its original, unedited form by permission of the author)

He woke up in a cell. It was a clean, empty, plastic room. What made it a cell was the two Klingon guards at the door. Spock closed his eyes immediately and feigned unconsciousness. He reached out with his mind, cautiously. The body behind his, also sprawled on the floor -- he knew it was Captain Kirk. He sensed no other human minds. No native minds, either. Only the rawness of open, unguarded minds, too far away to read or affect, and definitely Klingon.

He began to use his other senses. there were low voices. His universal translator was working, then. He could understand the occasional word he could hear. The voices were useful in other ways. They bounced off the walls. A small room. No covering on the floor.

It was cold, too. He was naked. From the amount of heat radiating from behind him, so was Kirk. He was not hurt. Was the captain? He flared his nostrils slightly but could not detect the scent of human blood.

It was time to take a small risk. Spock looked out through slitted eyes. He faced the only door, and there was a guard standing in front of it, a large, heavily muscled male with a dour expression. It was not so easy to look at the other guard, but he was sitting in a chair. Definitely a smaller man, smiling and tugging one side of his long moustache as he stared at the prisoners.

"I wish the Federation pigs would wake up. There's no challenge to this duty," grumbled the large one.

The other tipped his chair back and glanced up with a cheerful sneer. "Ah, Bodar! Bored? You want these spies awake? You know the stun will not wear off for at least a half hour. You have no patience. You are not suited for this job."

"No patience with you, either, you horny nose-drip."

"There HAS been an improvement now that the lab has taken away their clothing, don't you think?"

"They don't stink as much now. So what. All Feds stink. And now we have to look at their ugliness."

"I've seen worse. Paid to see worse." The contemplative look on the handsome, small face intensified. "Put their heads to the floor and who'd notice how ugly they are?"

"Kova, you think about screwing too much," Bodar complained again, scratching his beard but still keeping both eyes on the sprawled bodies. "Besides, a human and a Vulcan. Pah."

"Human males, Bodar, are great fun. They keep themselves mostly to women, you know, so they don't know soldier's ways. They scream and fight and it is as good as Orion whores!"

"Ha. You say. But Vulcans. I have done a Vulcan. They kneel down when you order but they are like rocks. It is like putting your stick in slime."

"Have you really? A Vulcan?" Kova asked, obviously intrigued.

"They gave the merchant citizens to the soldiers when we took Adilas. Enough for the whole regiment's pleasure. Vulcans and Andorians and Adilasns. One of the old Vulcans and an Adilas boy were handed to my war-partner Riban and me. We later traded the Vulcan for a bottle of wine. He was no good."

"No good? One knife dull among many, perhaps. This one looks young. Maybe yours was too old."

"You are thinking of sporting with these?"

"Why not? The commander did say we should try to make their waiting unhappy. Who knows, when the flagship arrives, they may be given over to the troops, for you know how much the ship-captain hates Federation spies. What chance will we have then, among thirty others? The section leaders alone will sport the life out of them!"

Spock saw the one called Bodar rubbing his hands absently, as if soothing an arthritic ache, while his whole face darkened in thought. "I go first," he said at last. "Do we take them asleep?"

"Imagine a Fed waking up to find your stick stabbing his bowels out!" Kova was laughing. "'d damage your ears with his shriek!"

Bodar laughed, too, but he was shaking his head. "Let's see if we can kick one awake. The human," he insisted.

"That will not be necessary." The smooth, controlled Vulcan tones caused both Klingons to drop into a defensive crouch. The Vulcan was not only conscious, but sitting up.

"Ah! Worm!" From the awkward position half off his chair, a pleased Kova stood up, stretched, passed his weapon to Bodar and casually walked over. He stood, looming over the seated Vulcan and grinning.

"Ah, worm!" he repeated. "My worm! Bodar wants the soft-gutted human and that makes you mine to fuck!"

If he was expecting a fearful response he was disappointed. "It is Bodar's loss," the Vulcan said coldly.

The Vulcan seemed unperturbed. Even cooperative. Kova's eyes narrowed speculatively as he wondered what the alien was up to. With a calculated, easy-hipped swagger he walked around the Vulcan, kicking the human out of his way and up against the wall. Then he prodded the thin, hairy Vulcan thigh with his booted toe.

"You think you are worth my time?" Kova grinned. It drew his moustache up and made it a black frame for his gleaming white teeth.

"If you are made as human or Vulcan males, it may be worth your time." Spock looked up, meeting Kova's eyes, allowing some challenge to show in them. "I have mated with males. If you wish an unwilling partner, I will be as he," Spock indicated Bodar, "described. Submissive and passively uncooperative. We do not fight. However, if you wish a challenge," Spock's eyes dropped to the floor as if he were embarrassed. His voice dropped to a whisper, "Try and see if you can make me cry out -- with pleasure. No one ever has," he added. There was just the right amount of braggadocio and confidence in Spock's voice. The Klingon never knew how completely he was manipulated.

"Vulcan! Do you think I can't?" Laughing, the Klingon reached down for a handful of black hair. He jerked Spock's head up, forcing the prisoner to look at him.

"Unknown," answered the Vulcan. "I have never joined with a Klingon." He used his trump card. "Are they better than humans?"

Kova laughed again and hauled Spock to his feet, then shoved Spock face first against the wall. The lax body of Captain Kirk fell across Spock's feet as the Klingon tugged him into position. "Let's see what you have to offer, Vulcan!"

He studied the nude body in front of him. Black hair was scattered in sparse, serpentine patterns across the boney Vulcan back. The buns were small and white, over legs dark with curling hair. Kova poked a stiff finger here and there, finally down the crack of the ass and into the anus. He pulled it out with a jerk and demanded, "Turn around, Fed scum."

Spock did, slowly, face impassive.

"You look better from the front. But not much," taunted the Klingon. He prodded here, too, the flat, oblong paps first, and then the ribs and pubic hair. Last, he reached out quickly and scooped up the soft Vulcan cock. "This is a baby's toy! Do you expect to please with this thin blade? No wonder no one has made you scream with pleasure!" He squeezed it, laughing, then gave several ungentle yanks. "Well, maybe I could find some use for it. I could cut it off and have a whip handle made of it. I saw that done once." Out of the corner of his eye, he was

checking to see if Spock would react. When he didn't, Kova gave one final, lewd, fingering tug and then reached under to thump the small balls.

He tired of that. "Turn," he demanded, "bend over." Instant compliance. Kova flashed his grin at Bodar, and then leisurely reached down and shoved his finger up into Spock again, chuckling at the reflexive twitch of flesh that Spock did not quite suppress. "What? From my finger?" jeered Kova. Spock was silent and motionless.

Kova took his hand back and stood, staring down at the submissive, still bent over Vulcan.

"I told you. They are not any fun," Bodar said.

Kova made a rude gesture. "From behind, I think," he said with mock deliberation. His hand was at his waist, unfastening the flap of cloth that was both quilted codpiece and fly. He remained dressed, but his cock sprang free.

Kova caressed his own part lovingly, the natural lubrication automatically distributed by the action. The walnut brown organ stood hard and tall. Yet he was content to play with it idly, while he stared at the Vulcan, who was still motionless in the awkward position.

"On your knees," the Klingon at last demanded, and as the Vulcan complied, Kova knelt behind him. With no gentleness at all he spread the paper white cheeks. snubbed his cock against the wrinkled entrance and gave a mighty shove.

As Spock had forced himself to be completely relaxed, the action left the Klingon off balance but sheathed to the hilt. Kova grunted and recovered his balance but said nothing. He had more pressing business. He began to fuck enthusiastically. It did not matter to him that Spock was not really participating. At that point, Kova was interested in nothing but his own pleasure.

He found a great deal of pleasure, if judgment could be made from the throaty gasps he generated. His moustache was wet from his own breath, his face contorted into a fierce grimace. It was an extended pleasure. Often the Klingon seemed near his release, but then he would groan, change position or pace, and drive on again.

It became too much for Bodar. After a hasty check on the still unconscious human, he interrupted Kova by placing a heavy hand on his shoulder, and pulling him out of the Vulcan.

Kova's glance was pure ire. "You can't have him!" he snarled.

"Don't want the Vulcan scum," Bodar replied, giving a jerk to Kova's pants, pulling them down to the other's knees. "You have him. I'll have -- you!" As he spoke, he pulled his own cock out, kneading it energetically. He gave it a few fast jerks, spread some spit on it and pushed it toward his partner's body. "Get on with what you were doing," Bodar encouraged. Wordlessly, Kova did so, holding still as Bodar shoved into him.

Then they were moving. Bodar, Kova, even Spock, who braced himself against the double weight with Vulcan strength, and then pressed back into the thrusting.

Kova was sweating now, gnawing wetly on the Vulcan back and gasping and fucking and being fucked and finally yelling out his victory and collapsing on the bony Vulcan back.

Spock was braced solidly, and Bodar was not through yet. Caught between them, Kova lay loosely, accepting Bodar's banging thrusts. Wherever he still touched the Vulcan he was hot and sweating. He held onto him for support, breathing with the rhythm of Bodar's strokes. He felt light-headed, disoriented. Something was trying to get his attention.... He finally decided it was his cock, limply riding in the fiery crack of the Vulcan's ass. it was getting stiff again. He fought against Bodar's heavy stroking, trying to pull back enough to aim himself into the Vulcan ass again.

This seemed to excite Bodar, who growled and wrestled Kova back into place. He finished then, in a flurry of rapid-fire strokes and a gargled cry.

Bodar slipped to the floor. Kova found himself not as interested in another round as he thought and sprawled down, too. It was heady relief just to get away from the hot Vulcan. He remembered his duty, though, and was turning toward him just as a spike fingered hand closed on his shoulder....

Spock, still kneeling beside the two he had just neck-pinchd, turned, seeking his captain, to rouse him, to take these uniforms and escape. He froze. The captain was conscious, and the expression on his face...Spock made no explanation, merely bending over the bodies and beginning to undress them.

Kova's clothes would be tight on Kirk, short on Spock...Spock considered and then set them aside for himself, taking Bodar's for Kirk. He passed them, along with Bodar's weapon, to his captain. Kirk mechanically began to dress, but his attention was centered on Spock. Finally he shook his head, as if trying to clear it.

They knew what they had to do next. Escape and get to the shielded shelter that was their base. If it was still a secret. Finding Klingons on this primitive planet was a surprise. The Federation had thought it was dealing only with transmission pirates, but if it were the Klingons who were intercepting and altering Federation signals, the implications were sinister.

How many Klingon soldiers were here? What level of technology did they bring with them? Did they have the cooperation of the native government? Kirk and Spock had no answers, only some vital knowledge to protect and pass on. The only safe place for them to be was the sheltered cellar.

They dressed hastily, knowing that the uniforms would be an effective disguise only at a distance, but unable to go naked among the rather conservative natives.

Kirk recovered enough to take command, motioning for Spock to flatten himself against the wall as he cautiously approached the door. It yielded to pressure, and no one was in the hallway. Silent as mist they stole along the corridors, thankful that it was a native building, not designed to be a prison. It had too many doors for proper security. They were out one and down the nearest alley within minutes.

Spock recognized the locale almost immediately. He held up two fingers, then

pointed north. Two kilometers. Kirk nodded to show he understood. Far glimpses of the brighter colors of the main streets and snippets of noise kept pace with the fleeing men as they ran through the alleys. At last they heard behind them what they did not want to hear -- guttural shouts in Klingonese. In mutual accord they began to run faster, until they were within several blocks of their goal. And they could not travel by alley. They had to cross an open square. They paused to look for Klingons, to catch their breath. Kirk pulled his stolen shirt off and put it on inside out, and Spock, wordlessly observing, did the same. Walking naturally, they began to traverse the perimeter of the square. It was a long walk, and every time a merchant observed them, puzzled, every time they were jostled by the crowd, they expected to be accosted.

It didn't happen. Perhaps if Kirk had been alone he would have given in and run the last few yards. With Spock so stoically calm beside him, he forced himself to a steady pace, even as they passed safely into the building, went down two flights of crude wooden stairs and through the hidden panel.

Inside the room, a slice of the Federation existed, a contrast to the native culture that was very obvious. Clear, even lighting, comfortable furniture designed for human/Vulcan anatomy, beds that were more than a pallet on the floor, food and water that could be consumed without testing. Kirk sighed his huge relief and quickly went to the chest that held their clothing. He stripped off the scratchy Klingon cloth gratefully. But he did it with his back to the room and his shoulders stiff.

Jim had put on his uniform. They had been wearing light, informal civilian clothing when here before, and it was four days until pick-up. But Jim had put on his uniform. The significance was not lost on Spock, and he also put on his uniform.

The captain had put tea and coffee on the table and was seated. He did not look directly at Spock when he sat down, but he asked, "Are you all right? Not hurt?"

"I am not hurt," Spock replied, gazing at his captain with outward calm. He could see the ripple along Kirk's neck as the human swallowed, hard. Yet a long minute passed and Kirk seemed to have nothing to say.

Spock knew what was on his mind. He had known for two years that this time would come. He had not known that his sexual preference for men would be so graphically demonstrated to Jim Kirk. He had always known that it would be difficult for the captain to accept.

The Vulcan fought down a warmth at the thought. It was Kirk who most attracted him, of all the men he had ever met. Yet he knew, too, that Jim Kirk was not for him. The man's heterosexuality was legend. Spock could accept that fact, had accepted it long ago. But his body had been aroused and denied only an hour ago and it yearned. He controlled it.

A factual report, he decided, would be most acceptable to Kirk. Without preamble, he began. "Sir. When I became aware...conscious, in the cell, I heard our guards discussing the...sexual use of our bodies. Escape was of primary importance. I could not overpower them both and you were unconscious. I determined that the sexual contact they desired would allow me to control the situation. Through the physical contact, I was able to gain access to the mind of the one who touched

me. I projected his sensations to the other guard. He was receptive to the idea of participation and abandoned his post. When both were sexually expended, I was able to render them unconscious with the neck-pinch."

"Which explains why I woke up to see you...." Kirk cleared his throat awkwardly, "with both of them." He couldn't say it. Fucking with both of them.

"Affirmative. I regret it caused you distress," Spock replied.

Kirk opened his mouth, closed it, then shrugged and said honestly, "It was a surprise, all right."

It is time to tell him, thought Spock, resolutely. "Were you aware...." He stopped and met Kirk's asking eyes. It was hard to continue, but he forced himself. "...that I am bisexual?" The words floated in the silence surrounding them.

"No. I didn't know that," Jim Kirk answered, his voice almost normal.

"I do not wish you to be concerned about psychological or physical damage because of a same sex union. There was none."

"You enjoyed it?" There was a trace of accusation in the human's voice.

"Negative. I...no. Because of the telepathic aspect of what I was attempting, I did experience some pleasure of a transitory nature. It was the Klingon's pleasure. Not mine." Spock was speaking about his own sexuality with the same rational objectivity he used for any subject that interested him.

Confused, exhausted, Kirk took a deep gulp of his now cool coffee. "I never suspected." Here he was, having a discussion of...about sex, with Spock. Bisexual? He remembered the last conversation he'd had with Spock about sex, about two years ago. Spock in Pon Farr and twisting and sweating through an agonizing explanation. Bisexual. Was that why T'Pring....

Spock interrupted his thoughts. "I have felt that, as my captain, and my friend, you should know of it. I did not know how to introduce the subject." He warmed his hands on the stoneware of his cup, turning it slowly as he continued. "I was not certain of your personal opinions. If you feel this information reduces my effectiveness as an officer under your command, I will make arrangements for a transfer."

"You're talking nonsense!" Kirk frowned. "Do you really think I care about any of my crew's sexual preferences? That I'd get rid of somebody because of it?" He seemed shocked that Spock would consider him prejudiced.

"I am not speaking nonsense. I do not attribute to you those negative characteristics. I postulate a future occurrence, where my own preferences become known and, because of our friendship, rumor will project a similar taste to you."

"Me?" Kirk laughed. "With my reputation, another rumor or two won't have much effect!"

"Perhaps not. I have not found those who have congress with their own sex

to be universally accepted."

At Spock's cryptic reference, Kirk sent a concerned glance. "Does anybody on the ship know?"

"Doctor McCoy." Spock did not mention the effect of a certain strain of human bacteria on his digestive tract, and the explanation he had been forced to give the medical officer. McCoy had been professional about the incident, asking no intimate details and refraining from teasing. But he had told Spock at the time that he felt the captain should be informed.

And now, Spock realized, he should report to McCoy for a physical because of unknown medical implications of Klingon material in his system. He was not looking forward to it.

"Did McCoy...?" Kirk began testily.

"No. Doctor McCoy is quite...neutral in his expressed opinions on the subject."

"Oh. Good." Kirk finished his second cup of coffee and said with feigned casualness, "We'll be cooped up here four days waiting for pick-up. Can't go out at all -- too risky...."

"Do you need assurances as to my conduct?" The Vulcan voice was a trifle too cold.

"I didn't say that!" Kirk was both hasty in his denial and outraged that he had been misinterpreted. "I have NEVER doubted your integrity!"

Only my motives? thought Spock. Do you suspect? Suspect how much I feel, how much I want from you? It was easy when you did not know. I could be with you and be content with that. Now your eyes will meet mine and there will always be a question in them.

His thoughts touched his expression with sadness. "My apologies, Captain, for doubting yours," he said softly.

Kirk's understanding flooded his face and suddenly it was all right between them again. "Chess?" he offered.

Chess. Their universal panacea for troubled times. Spock, who would rather have had the security of work, did not dare risk his captain's frame of mind, and so went and got the board out without further words. After all, he considered, Kirk did play a good game of chess. He was distracted from thoughts of the man behind the moves. He became so absorbed in the game that when Kirk spoke again, it was startlingly intrusive.

"I'm curious," Kirk said, diffidently.

Spock looked up, calm on the exterior, wary inside.

"Been to the Castle Mile?" He named a notorious males-only club on Argelius.

"No," Spock, who had never frequented any of the bars or bath houses of any planet, did not elaborate.

"Pity. I've always wondered if the stories were even half true."

"I understand not," Spock replied carefully.

Kirk didn't ask his source of information.

But it did get his thoughts turned to what sort of relationships Spock would have. Who and what and where? He decided to risk another question.

"Are you steady with anyone?" Then he qualified it with, "I don't want to make any mistakes, some faux pas, with...well...."

"I understand. I am not involved sexually with any member of the ENTERPRISE crew, past or present," he said firmly. "It is not advocated in regulations. Specifically, subsection 84-B dealing with chain of command and violations of the co-service compact...."

"Right," Kirk interrupted with a smile. He understood. He didn't have sexual relationships with crew members, either. He turned his attention to the game. For a while. He found that his mind kept returning to the idea of Spock's sexuality. There was a certain sophistication connected with bisexuality. Spock, by association, took on a slightly different stature in his mind. That took some mental adjustment on Kirk's part. With his reputation as a lover, he had always felt a small sense of superiority over Spock in that department. It was like a pride, and it stung a little as he came to terms with it. *The tortoise catches up with the hare*, he thought, with a mental smile. *Your first officer could make love to, satisfy anyone, man or woman. You're only in half the race, Jim Kirk.* Yet he didn't feel inadequate.

Spock seemed to be frowning. "Penny for 'em," Kirk offered casually.

"I regret that I could see no other method than telepathic suggestion to effect our escape," he said as he looked up.

The sexual part isn't even what's bothering him the most, Kirk realized, with a bit of shock. *It was using his mind on the Klingons!*

"Look at it this way. We got out of a bad situation and nobody got killed. We have absolute proof of Klingon activity -- we have the uniforms. And we're safe here. We've done worse things for fewer results!"

"I am not sure that is a comfort," Spock said dryly.

"All we've got," Kirk pointed out, with a wave of the pawn in his hand. "Wishing otherwise is useless."

That was true. Yet, Spock thought, *I wish you had not seen me intimate with them.* Had there been another way? Had he let his body choose for him? To act without true consideration was abhorrent to any Vulcan. Had he allowed the Klingons more use of his body than circumstances demanded?

He could not deny that he drew pleasure from a male member put into him, from the mating and the passion flowing from another mind. The Klingon had been crude in technique and primitive in his lust. But it had been so long -- eight months, two days -- since Spock had had a sexual encounter. Longer than that since he had taken the dominating role and placed himself into a partner's willing flesh. Had he chosen hedonistically?

He reigned his mind in firmly. It made no difference now and there was danger in considering sexual matters in the presence of James Kirk. If even once, by accident, his desire showed in his eyes, his friendship with this human would be in jeopardy. He would not risk it. Therefore he schooled his mind to the game, to such effect that he won it at last.

Denying Kirk a rematch, he began on his work instead, and when all the reports were gem-perfect and work no longer an option, he slept. Four days. He became adroit at leading the conversation to Kirk's interests, at feeding a basically one sided conversation. He did not allow them to stray back to the subject of sexuality. Instead, they discussed the re-organization of ship's services, the shape the ENTERPRISE had been in when they had left her in dry-dock, and Scotty's new bagpipes.

Kirk had mumbled about "how the admiral had managed to talk us into this damn mission!" and Spock had refrained from pointing out that Starfleet had no trouble at all recruiting Kirk for this 'adventure'. It was all very much as usual between them. Yet Spock sensed a small change, and several times he sensed Kirk staring at him when Spock was turned away.

Both were definitely relieved when their pick-up ship arrived. They were assigned a room to share on the shuttle, but neither of them spent much time there. Four days in one small room made larger rooms and diversity attractive even to Spock. Spock had the use of the ship's science computer. Kirk because involved in a flirtation with one of the ship's officers.

They finally reached Starbase 8 and were debriefed, and returned to the ENTERPRISE. Scotty reported all repairs and changes complete. They were ready to go. In a flurry of activity the captain sent them toward Alpha Durna, and if there was more haste than the orders called for, no one noticed it. Perhaps no one noticed the energy the captain put into his work during the next few weeks. At least two people were aware that the captain's schedule involved little association with the first officer outside of duty shifts.

Spock reacted to the neglect by withdrawing to his work. In his quiet research, he practiced patience. He was not really hurt by the change. He was willing to give Jim Kirk all the time he needed to come to terms, to adjust. It might have been easier if Spock had confessed to an on-board lover. Then the relationship with Kirk might have been reinforced as friendship only, and he might have been able to relax.

Knowing his captain, with enough confidence in Kirk's character to be satisfied that when Jim Kirk found a comfortable adjustment, he would communicate to Spock the role he expected Spock to play. And Spock, who knew exactly how important Jim Kirk was to him, would take up that role and play it. Without objection.

The ship's doctor, on the other hand, watched the captain ignore the first officer, and seethed. McCoy was also aware of the shifting scales, and having

both more and less faith in human nature than Spock, there came a day when he showed up at Kirk's door with two glasses and a tall black bottle.

Jim, curious, welcomed the doctor and settled him on one side of the small table that graced the captain's quarters. The table that seldom saw any use other than to hold the chess board. Perhaps it was that which gave Kirk a premonition of what was on the doctor's mind. At any rate, he was not surprised when McCoy began straightforwardly.

"I hear Spock finally told you," McCoy said with a sip of the fine wine Kirk had poured out.

"You could have heard that only from Spock," the captain pointed out from over his glass.

"True." The doctor studied Kirk's face for signs of stress and waited for further reaction from Kirk.

"Well?" Kirk prodded, too canny to let the doctor stall this early in the conversation. Bones had something on his mind. Better to kick it around now.

"Bother you?" McCoy asked, casually.

"Oh, for God's sake, Bones!" Kirk exploded.

"Bothers you." McCoy said it with a nod, a trifle too self-congratulatory.

"As a matter of fact, no. Spock and I talked it out rather completely. It doesn't bother me."

"Which is why you've hardly spoken to him in weeks."

"We've been busy, Doctor. Or maybe you haven't noticed, down in Sickbay." Kirk was elegantly sarcastic.

"Busy? I suppose. Busy ignoring the truth." McCoy seemed to be giving full attention to his drink.

"What the...what's that supposed to mean?" Kirk demanded irately.

"If Spock had been stabbed, you'd have been on my case continually, at his side every minute, until I'd have to chase you out. Seeing as how he was only raped, you don't want to hear about it."

"He wasn't...." Kirk's voice faded into silence.

"You don't know, do you?" the doctor asked.

"Raped?" Kirk repeated.

"Got any other word for a forced sexual act. I doubt Spock," he emphasised, "did it for the S & M thrill of it all. In fact, I suspect he did it partly

to keep a fat Klingon cock out of your own virgin ass." His words were striking home -- Kirk was wide-eyed and still, his glass forgotten in his hand.

"He's...okay?" Kirk asked at last.

McCoy snorted. That was better. "He's all right. I'm just pointing out," he said, more gently, "that you've been avoiding the incident mentally -- and Spock, physically. Gave you a shock, waking up to see him under a Klingon."

"Under two," Kirk said grimly.

"Two?" McCoy's eyebrow flicked up.

"The big Klingon fucking the little one, and the little one fucking Spock. Regular daisy chain."

"And Spock?"

"I couldn't see. He neck-pinned them practically the minute they were done."

"Um," McCoy said thoughtfully. Then he added, "Your ass is virgin. Isn't it?"

Kirk shot him a none-of-your-business look but answered, "Yes."

"Thought so. Too bad."

"Too bad?" Kirk whipped his words out suspiciously.

"You and Spock have a good friendship. Friendships make a good basis for a sexual relationship." The doctor didn't make his suggestion directly, going carefully.

"Spock doesn't want me!" Kirk said confidently.

"Don't be so damn sure. Spock doesn't know what he wants. Vulcan, human, male, female. Or rather, I think he knows exactly what he wants. A certain kind of acceptance. And when he finds it, he'll take it, whatever form it comes in. But you can bet your golden nacelles, he's thought about you and him."

"Look, he doesn't want me. Besides, he said he's never screwed anybody on the ship. He's just like me, he keeps his private life off it."

"How much of that is happenstance? You think he'd turn you down? You, his best friend, because of that?" McCoy was still addressing his remarks to the table and the glass, but he could see Kirk's face reflected in the liquid, a white, open-mouthed wavering circle.

"It's against regs, anyway," Kirk was adding.

"Sure, and you know how well it's observed. I heard you, yourself, say that you'd make a play for that admiral -- what's her name, Lori something -- if you ever got grounded for some reason. That would be a case of two people with

probably conflicting interests, getting together. You have no trouble thinking of that!"

"That's different!" Kirk protested.

"Isn't," countered the doctor gruffly. "You'd buck the regs. But not for Spock."

"Damn it, Bones, I'm not built that way! I can't! I can't! Not with a man, Bones. Not even with Spock!"

"Sit down," McCoy advised.

Kirk seemed surprised to find himself half out of his chair. He sat.

"Y'see, this is the point," McCoy said, topping off the glasses. "Now you can confront Spock with it, or let it ride. You can fall into a relationship with Spock that's pretty much the same as you've always had, and that's fine. But you do it with your eyes open. Spock, and his friendship -- it's not something you can just throw away. I know how much you have both put into your friendship. Spock especially. You ever think of what he's had to do, how he's had to change, just to be your friend? Salvage what you can. If you can." He sighed into his glass, watching his breath make ripples in the garnet liquid and wondering if his words would affect Kirk even as much as his breath moved the wine.

He made up his mind. "Spock has so much love to give, Jim," McCoy whispered.

"You can say that?" Kirk asked, surprised.

"If you can't see it, you're a bigger damn fool than you've given me to believe!" McCoy snapped.

"You're telling me about Spock?" Kirk demanded.

"I'm telling you about you," countered McCoy. "I'm saying that if you choose wrong, you don't get a second chance. But if you know you can't love Spock that way, don't drag it out. Don't drag out the hope he might have. Give him a chance for love somewhere else. He needs it."

"I understand, Bones." Kirk was tired. Weeks of pressure, and the wine, dragged at his eyes. He was tired of having McCoy here. "I really do," he said sincerely.

"Good." There was a little wine left in the bottom of his glass. McCoy drank it. "Don't make mistakes the other way, either. No good mistaking one kind of love for another. Thinking you can make a go of it on wishing it were so. I've done that. My wife was a tiger and I tried to make her into a house-cat. It...didn't work. Well...we are what we are."

"The air is the air," Kirk quoted softly.

"There's that, too," McCoy agreed, referring to Pon Farr. He saw that

Jim followed the thought. "That, too," he repeated, almost to himself. Then, with a half-groan, he abruptly stood. "I've had my say," he said as he rose. "I...aw, Jim!" He shook his head, finding nothing else to say.

Kirk stood, too, and followed the slumping doctor to the door. "You want the bottle?"

"You keep it," McCoy advised. You need it more than I do, his tone implied.

"Thanks. For everything," Kirk said.

"Yeah." The doctor's hand rested briefly on Jim's shoulder and then he was gone.

Kirk went back to the table. He sat, and then hefted the bottle experimentally. Half full. Or half empty. He poured his glass full.

"The air is the air," he said to the empty room, and drained his glass. "Oh, Spock!" He sighed, and said again, "Oh, Spock." As if pulled by a dozen gravities, his head went down into his arms and he cried.

FIRE-WATCH

He watches the stars,
hair aflame,
eyes smouldering
with the energy
of a lover
in the spinning depths of
pleasure.
And helplessly
my body reaches out
to that promise of heat.

He watches the stars as
I watch him.

NATASHA SOLTEN

COMPENSATION

douya blacque

"Spock doesn't want me!" The sound of his own voice echoed hollowly through James Kirk's sleeping mind. "A regular daisy chain!" And the image: Spock heaving back against the pressure of the two Klingons, one on top of the other, both pounding their lust into his back. "And Spock?" McCoy's voice joined his own. The image of Spock being thoroughly fucked by those Klingon guards grew in proportion to reality, taking on new, frightening dimensions. He'd been unable to see Spock's face, but now, in dream, he saw clearly the pleasure surging through the trembling limbs, the heat of passion driving him to throw himself back onto the piercing flesh of the Klingon's cock. The usually serene mouth opened in a soundless scream of pleasure, the elegant neck arched back to breaking. Then those fathomless brown eyes were on Kirk, staring at him, and that non-smiling mouth drew wide with a grin that Kirk recognized as one of relief and release and Kirk knew; Spock had orgasmed; orgasmed while watching him, while watching Kirk watching as he was fucked by those huge Klingons...

The dream shifted....

That grin, he'd seen it before.... "I can compensate." The words burned through Kirk's oxygen-starved brain. McCoy, talking to T'Pol. Then a sudden hiss and spread of coolness touched his arm. His lungs expanded, his mind cleared. And Spock was over him, trying to kill him...trying to fuck him. That grin, while that well-known body thrust into his own. Kirk could feel the power of Spock's taut body pressing his into the hot sand, trying to get away from the demands Spock urged upon him. He didn't want this, didn't want Spock. "Spock doesn't want me!" But he did...does...will.... He felt Spock's hands moving over him, over every reachable part of his body, felt the Vulcan's sweat merge with his own, caught the scent and flinched away, appalled at occurrences, appalled that this was being allowed. He tried to look around but could see nothing but human-blood red sky...and Spock's smiling face.

"Jim!"



Kirk started, turned in the firm embrace to grin back. Spock stood before him, a never-seen-before grin splitting his face. His own heart pounded in his ears, a slower echo of the one he could feel through the pulse in the wrists that pressed into his arms. His eyes were riveted to the sight of that grin and he wanted to cry or laugh or hug the Vulcan until Time herself stopped him. But he did none of those things, only watched as the moment passed and Spock withdrew once again.

The dream shifted....

"Were you aware that I am bisexual?" The question resounded off the invisible walls of the dreamscape, teasing him with their repetition. He turned away, trying to run but his feet wouldn't move, his arms were lead, he sank heavily to the ground. On the walls of his dream, imagined scenes began to play and he couldn't turn his attention from them. There was nowhere else to look.

Spock writhing beneath some faceless, hugely endowed male on some nameless shore leave planet; Spock on top of another faceless male, pounding his own impossibly large organ into the willing flesh of the other; Spock naked; Spock sexual; Spock as Kirk had never imagined him before. Spock....

In his dream, Kirk sat helplessly on the ground, eyes rooted to the endless play of scene after scene, tears running unnoticed down his pale cheeks....

The taste of last night's wine and tears mixed with the bile which rose in Kirk's throat as the dream ended and he was jarred awake. Memory remained, unmerciful in its clarity, unmerciful in that he could still see those dream-scenes, still smell his sweat mingled with Spock's.

He sat up, noting that his duty shift was less than an hour away. He closed his eyes, tried every discipline he knew to sublimate the dream, to sublimate the rising fear and apprehension, the sudden realization that nothing could possibly ever be as it was before between Spock and himself. This new item of data was far too vital, too revealing for anything to ever return to how it was before. Innocence was dead and James Kirk didn't like it one bit.

At first, the knowledge had shocked him, despite his well-earned reputation of being open minded. The very idea of Spock being actively sexual in any way was something he'd never really considered. Aside from the occasional female along their travels, aside from T'Pol and Pon Farr, the subject had simply not arisen between them. No, it wasn't that Spock was bisexual, although there was a certain threat in that knowledge that Kirk refused to consider, that bothered him; it was the fact that there was a vital, essential part of Spock's life that had gone unnoticed, unknown, unseen, unheard. There was nothing Spock didn't know about him. No secrets between them...but, obviously, he'd been wrong. He couldn't really blame Spock, though, for not telling him. He nearly laughed at the image of Spock bringing up the subject casually over chess! Impossible image. Impossible situation.

It had been years since Jim Kirk had cried; not for Sam, not for Edith, nor for Kendra or any of the others. But, last night he'd wept over Spock, over the fact that his first officer, his best friend, was something he didn't, for all of his own sophistication and worldliness, understand. The gulf that Kirk had placed between them seemed to grow wider as he prepared himself for duty and left his cabin. He knew it was wrong to continue this animosity, this unspoken line of demarcation between them. But there was nothing he could do at this moment to change his own attitude. McCoy had been right, he owed Spock more than he could ever repay, he owed him his freedom if he couldn't offer anything else.

"Spock?"

The Vulcan looked up from his console to find his captain standing beside him. "Sir?"

"I'd like to speak with you after this shift. If you'd come to my cabin...?"

Spock looked at him with a puzzled expression but agreed. Now he stood outside Kirk's quarters, curiosity eating him up inside. What could this sudden summons mean? Kirk had avoided him for so long, why the change? What revelation had Kirk experienced that had made him want to talk now?

Idle speculation was shoved to the back of his mind as he buzzed for admittance. At Kirk's acknowledgement, he entered, standing just out of the way of the door sensor as it swooshed shut behind him.

The room was warm, warmer than usual for the captain's comfort. An eyebrow wanted to rise, but Spock held it down. His heart skipped a beat when Kirk smiled at him, something his friend hadn't done since....

"Spock? Please, sit down."

Spock realized Kirk had just repeated himself. He nodded and sat in the chair before Kirk's desk. He folded his hands in his lap and waited patiently for Kirk to begin.

"Mr. Spock, I owe you an apology," Kirk glanced up from under lowered eyelids, a shy grin on his face.

"Sir?"

"I've been unforgivably careless about our friendship lately. I've neglected you and I am very sorry."

Spock couldn't stop his eyebrow from rising now. He waited.

"I had some...things to think about, to work out, and I guess you got

punished in the wake of that." He cleared his throat, rose and sat in the chair beside Spock. "I guess you know you're my best friend?" He phrased it as a question, looking to Spock for his answer.

Spock was speechless, literally, so he merely nodded.

"Good. I know I don't say it often, if I've ever said it at all, so I've saying it now because it's...human to do so. You are my best friend. I love you. I want you to be happy." He paused again. "Mr. Spock, I don't believe you are happy."

"Is this the matter which you have been cogitating?"

Kirk smiled softly. "In a way. I had some...adjusting to do in regards to how I see you, to my image of you. I know it's a personal subject, but, from what you said back during...that mission, I'm assuming some kind of right, as your friend, to speak of it now." He licked his lips, eyes flicking around the room, betraying his nervousness. "I'd never considered your personal...needs before then. I mean, after...T'Pring and aside from Leila and Zarabeth, I'd never considered that you might need companionship...other than me, I mean. And, since I don't know how else to say this, I'm just going to say it: I don't want you to restrict yourself because of me or of what you think I may think of your actions. I want you to do whatever it is you have to do to be happy. Do you understand?"

Spock looked away from that glowing, earnest face. His heart beat too fast, his eyes kept trying to turn the world into a mad design of black and red. He drew a deep breath before answering. "Just what is it you are giving me permission to do?" His voice was soft, but far too low.

Kirk shivered. "I'm not giving you permission to do anything. You don't need anyone's permission to do what you need to do, Spock. I'm only trying to assure you that I understand, or that I'm trying to understand. I want you to be happy."

"I am a Vulcan," Spock reminded.

"I know that!" Kirk stood suddenly. "Don't you think I know that?" he hissed. Then, dropping his head to his chest, he turned his back on his friend. "Sorry. Didn't mean to.... Shit. This is hard for me."

"I know."

Kirk returned to the chair beside Spock, a small smile on his face. "The very obvious fact that you are a Vulcan, my friend, does not exclude the also obvious fact that you are not made of stone, that you are a compassionate, and thus feeling, being. The simple fact that you have told me of your sexual preference means you have some needs, some feelings, or you'd have no preference at all."

Spock nearly smiled at Kirk's logic. "True."

"Then quite being obtuse and give me a little help here."

"Jim," Spock touched Kirk's hand lightly. "You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do. I feel as if I've been...limiting you by my lack of knowledge of you. I've assumed things about you in the past that I don't want to assume in the future. I want you to feel able to confide in me or to...share your friends with me." He shook his head. "Spock, no matter who I've slept with in the past or who I will sleep with in the future, you will always be closer to me than anyone. All I want is for that to work both ways."

"I do...appreciate what you're saying, Jim. And I am grateful for your generosity and understanding. There will come a time when I will have to...align myself with someone, when I will have to enter into a permanent relationship. It is my nature, my Vulcan nature." He looked at Kirk to make sure his friend understood. "Yet I find I have no wish to return to Vulcan nor to burden myself with a...roommate, if you will. I am far too independent at this point for such a thing. I also wish to remain in service as I am now to Starfleet...and to you."

Kirk thought he understood what Spock was saying, but he wanted to hear it. "Spock...."

"I do not foresee the time when I will leave you, Jim. For anyone."

Kirk swallowed. "Me either. I mean, I don't foresee my leaving you, either. I think that's what I needed to know. That and that you'll not hide anything this important from me in the future."

"I will endeavor not to...if you will make the same promise."

Kirk smiled at the light in Spock's eyes. "I promise."

They sat in companionable silence, neither wanting to leave the other's company, but neither having anything more to say. Kirk glanced at the chess set, Spock shook his head 'no'. They remained silent, absorbing the long-missed togetherness, for hours before Kirk started nodding off and, after seeing the human to bed, Spock left for his own quarters.

"Pari! How'd you manage that?" McCoy asked Kirk over after-dinner drinks.

"After the length of time it's been since we've had a decent shore leave, and after our last run in with the Romulans, command was...persuaded to see things my way." Kirk grinned over the rim of his glass.

"He threatened them again," Spock translated.

"Please, Spock! Stating a few simple facts, pointing out the potential repercussions of various actions on H.Q.'s part isn't 'threatening' anyone!"

"He threatened them," Spock and McCoy spoke together. The two humans laughed.

"Anyway," Kirk continued. "We've got a full ten days, guaranteed. No matter what, they won't call us. They've even assigned the EXCALIBUR to our patrol area while we're gone. If the galaxy is threatened with destruction while we enjoy the various pleasures of Pari, they'll take care of it."

"No use taking all the glory every time the galaxy needs saving, eh?" McCoy teased.

"Indeed, it would seem time someone else takes up that task for a while," Spock agreed, sipping at the drink he'd been nursing all evening.

"So, gentlemen, do you think you can amuse yourselves for ten whole days off ship?"

"I can damn well try!"

"Spock?" Kirk turned to him after punching the doctor amiably on the arm.

"I foresee no difficulty, sir."

"Personally, I plan on finding the most beautiful woman I can and disappearing for at least five of those ten days!" Kirk laughed.

"Only five?" Spock inquired, face perfectly serious.

Kirk glanced at him, saw a slight spark in one eye, considered it and laughed. "If I didn't know better, Spock, I'd think you were challenging me."

"You are so sure of me, then?"

Kirk laughed again, joined by McCoy. It was good, healthy even, to see this type of teasing between captain and first officer. McCoy had been watching them carefully for months.

"Nothing you do...nothing you can do...will ever surprise me."

"Now who is challenging whom?"

Kirk held up his hands in mock defeat. "Not me, Spock. Never me!"

"Well, last time I was on Pari," McCoy broke in, "I met the sweetest little Hewan. Tavi was her name.... I think I'll just look her up, see if she's still ...uh...takin' clients."

"It would be advisable to be current on all your vaccinations then, Doctor," Spock commented.

McCoy nearly choked on his drink. He recovered quickly. "Speakin' of vaccinations, Spock. You'd best come see me before beaming down yourself." He

watched both men for a reaction to his blatant reference to just what Spock would most likely be doing on his shore leave. Spock blushed. Kirk looked away, anywhere but at his first officer.

"I will do just that, Doctor," Spock agreed quietly. He set his glass down and stood. "It is late. I have enjoyed the evening, but perhaps it is time to bring it to an end. We all have duty in the morning."

"Regular cuckoo clock, aren't you?" McCoy asked as he passed the Vulcan and stepped out into the corridor. "'Night, Jim. Spock."

"Good night, Bones." Kirk turned to his friend who still stood at his side. There seemed to be a question on that passive face. "What is it, Spock?"

"Nothing, Jim. Nothing at all. Sleep well."

"You, too." Kirk found himself facing a closed door.

Five days later, Spock stood outside the main transport station on Pari surveying the scurrying crowds. At four hours after planet noon, the city's lights were just beginning to blaze, a hint of the flaring brightness to come after full darkness fell. Spock wondered at the noise that surrounded him, the bustle, the life which seemed to pulse within the very pavement beneath his boot-clad feet. From first glance, Pari appeared to be exactly as it was reputed to be; just this side of Wrigley's. With a sigh, Spock turned left and headed for his hotel. There would be no meditation and museum gazing for him this shore leave. But then, quietude was not what he needed or wanted at the moment.

The walk to the hotel was short. Spock quickly checked in, deposited his small bag within his room and once again departed. Discreet inquiries at the desk had given him directions to the type of establishment he sought; a Meeting Room. Unlike the meat racks of the multitudinous bars and dance emporiums, Meeting Rooms were just that; places to meet other people. Quiet, civilized, tasteful lounges where people could mingle or remain alone.

The one Spock now entered reminded him of something out of Andor's distant past. Low-swung beams carved in intricate patterns at first unrecognizable to an untrained eye supported a crystal-clear roof and opaque glass walls. The many partitions within the building were also of glass and caused a dizzying, almost mirror-like effect. Spock stepped around the groups of people seated on cushions on the thick carpeted floor, seeking a quiet corner.

It was still early, the place was half empty, the murmuring of several different tongues absorbed by the walls, by the flooring. Spock settled in a deep red pillow-chair in the shadows where he could see most of the room. He ordered a hot drink and waited.

The young man was obviously human though not Terran. Spock watched him

sway through the maze of glass. As he drew closer, Spock could see the nearly yellow eyes. Kasimari then. The man couldn't have been thirty Kasimari seasons, 23 Solar years. Young for his race to be prowling the streets of Pari. Or was he meeting someone? Spock waited, watched as the other strolled about the different rooms, gathered up a drink, settled not far away and sipped sporadically from the glass he held. Still, Spock watched, waited. An hour passed. The Kasimari remained alone. Finally, hating this part of the game as he always did, Spock rose gracefully from his pillow and approached the other, bowing lower than he normally would in greeting.

"Good evening," he began in Standard. "I see you are alone. May I join you?"

Gold eyes looked up at him. Definitely Kasimari; no visible pupil in the eye. A smile turned full lips. A long-fingered hand gestured Spock to be seated.

Folding his legs beneath him, Spock sank down beside the man who still gazed at him with those disturbingly beautiful eyes. "I'm Scott." The voice was deep, clear, cool. Spock leaned closer.

"Scott?" he inquired at the unexpected name. "If you will forgive my curiosity, such is not a name of Kasimar."

"No, it's not. Tascotg'ofrai. Scott." The other smiled again.

"Again, I ask forgiveness. I have not introduced myself. I am Spock."

"Yes. You are, aren't you?"

An eyebrow rose.

Scott laughed. "You aren't exactly unknown, Commander. I recognized you when I first came in but didn't want to bother you."

"Then we both wasted an hour."

"Perhaps." The syllables resounded through Spock's chest as Scott spoke. The accent was light, clean, charming. "If I may be unforgivably curious myself, what are you doing in a place like this? I thought only the lost and lonely came here."

"Perhaps you are correct in that assumption. I'm here, on Pari, on shore leave from the ENTERPRISE."

"Yes, I know she's in orbit. Besides, I would hardly know you and not know your ship...or your captain, now, would I?"

"It seems unlikely." Spock's own voice dipped a decibel. "And what is your purpose in visiting this place?"

Scott smiled again and shrugged a terribly human shrug. "Looking. Maybe looking for you."

"I am flattered."

"You," Scott paused, "are modest."

Spock's lips quivered. "Perhaps."

"And perhaps you were looking for me?"

"Perhaps," Spock whispered.

"Actually, I'd had plans to meet a group of friends but decided against it. I was passing by and decided it looked interesting. I had nothing better to do. And then I saw you sitting there and decided to wait you out."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And?"

"And here we are, aren't we?"

"What do you know of me?" Spock's curiosity was genuine, his modesty pushed aside for the moment. He was intrigued, not used to being recognized by strangers.

"I know you're the first officer of the ENTERPRISE: that you are James T. Kirk's best friend and constant shadow; that you are Vulcan; that you are a brilliant scientist and an unsurpassed genius in the field of computers. I know nearly all your published writings, I've studied them. I know about your adventures, at least the ones touted in the media. I assume you're married as I've never met a Vulcan who isn't. I know you are lonely, or at least think you are and that you're looking for some...company at the moment."

"You know much. Where do you study?"

"Right now, nowhere. I was at the Terran Science Consortium and two years at the Vulcan Science Academy. I admit, that's where I learned most about you. You're a real hero, you know."

The look on Spock's face must have read 'No, I don't know', because Scott smiled kindly and continued. "They're very proud of their wandering son. It's true. Oh, I also know your father is Vulcan's most treasured ambassador and that your mother is human. You're an unique being, Mr. Spock."

Spock actually shrugged. "I am as I am."

"Nice, too. I bet you sing."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You seem so good at everything else, you probably can do the one thing I've always wanted to do and can't; sing. I have no ear at all for it. What I mean is that you are intelligent, accomplished, you serve an important purpose,

you're incredibly handsome and you're nice, too. Too good to be true, as our Terran friends might phrase it."

"You," Spock accused softly, "Are a tease, Scott. And very nice yourself."

"I guess I do admire you, obviously. And I can't quite believe I've telling you all this like some celebrity-struck girl. I must be boring you."

Spock shook his head, allowing a smile to crease his eyes. "Not at all. It is I who asked to sit with you."

"Yes, but, as I've said, you're nice, kind, polite. You'd never tell me if I were boring you."

"Don't be so sure of what you think you know of me. I am an ambassador's son and quite adept at getting out of uncomfortable situations."

"And you're relaxing." At Spock's inquisitive look, Scott explained. "Your Standard just picked up some English, a conjunction or two. Living around Terrans can do that if you don't watch out, you know."

"I have lived among Terrans for nearly twenty years. It's not so surprising that their idioms have...rubbed off."

Scott laughed; a crystal sound which reverberated in Spock's bones and shook his soul. The youthful face was like chiseled marble; pale and clear and nearly translucent. And those eyes.... Spock thought he could fall into them forever.

"I'm glad I like you. It would be completely disillusioning if I didn't. Not that I ever expected to run into you anywhere, let alone a Meeting Room on Pari, but I guess I had my impression of you all locked up and sealed. Strange how well you fit."

"Perhaps not so strange. You seem a perceptive individual. Would I be wrong to assume that you are not a blind idealist?"

"No, not at all. I guess I was when I was very young. I was going to be a Starship captain...just like Jim Kirk." Scott blushed a soft pink. "He's a hero of mine. Silly, but when I was very young, I drank in every bit of information that came off the ENTERPRISE. That's when I first heard of you. So, later, when I was on Vulcan, I guess I went out of my way to find out about you. It was that dreaming of following Kirk's footsteps that lead me where I am now, corny as that may sound."

"But you did not try for Starfleet?"

"No, I did try. In my second term, I found out just what it's like to live for months in the confines of a space ship. I also discovered a crippling case of claustrophobia." He smiled at Spock's understanding nod. "Not unusual, I'm told. I'm fine for short periods of time if I know I'll be getting off the ship at a certain time on a certain day at a certain place. It's those long months

in between...." He shivered. "So, my advisor sent me for an interview to the TSC and I was accepted immediately. And here I am, on my way back to Kasimar for a small visit."

"I understand your admiration of Captain Kirk. I, too, admire him, otherwise I wouldn't continue to serve under him. There's none better than he. And none better to serve as a role model. He served you well in that, I believe."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

"Perhaps, if you will be here long enough, I can arrange a meeting for you with him."

Scott sat up straighter. "I'll be here for another two weeks. It's not easy getting to Kasimar unless you have a Starship at your disposal. I'd like to meet Captain Kirk, very much. But, I don't want to intrude...either on his plans or yours."

"You are not intruding. I have...had no definite plans."

Scott's eyes narrowed, his generous mouth parted with a soft gasp. "Had?"

"I'm beginning to believe I ^{have} found someone who could cause me to make definite plans."

"You believe right."

Spock smiled very softly. "I hadn't thought to meet anyone I would...like. I'm very pleased that I was wrong."

"Me, too. I mean, I like you, too."

"That," Spock rose and reached down a hand to help Scott up, "is very convenient." He released the other's hand once Scott had gained his feet, but remained close as they left the Meeting Room. They walked in the general direction of Spock's hotel, speaking quietly. "I'd like you to come to my rooms, if that is to your liking."

Scott smiled at him, meeting him eye to eye. "That's fine. I have roommates or I'd have suggested the place I'm staying."

"Fortunately, I don't have roommates...this time."

"Have to bunk with the captain a lot, do you?"

Spock nodded as they entered the hotel lobby. "And, sometimes, our CMO as well."

"I thought you top guys got better treatment than that."

"There is rarely any choice."

They rode the lift up in silence. Scott followed Spock down the hallway and stepped into the room after Spock had coded in the lock sequence.

"Nice," Scott murmured, moving toward the high window and looking down on the multi-colored streets far below.

"Sometimes," Spock said, very close to Scott's ear, "We 'top guys' manage adequately."

Scott turned to find himself nearly chest-to-chest with the Vulcan. His gold eyes dilated, growing bright yellow around the edges. His lips parted and a gentle sigh escaped him.

Spock leaned forward and kissed the soft lips gently, then the long neck and high-boned cheeks. His senses cried out in relief. It had been four months since the regrettable incident with the Klingons and had been eight months, two days before that since he'd had a sexual encounter. It was now a full Solar year and his body ached with the need to be touched and enjoyed.

His arousal was fierce and immediate and Scott felt it burn into him as well. In moments they were both stripped and in each other's arms, hands exploring, mouths licking, biting, tasting each other's alien salts. Lust permeated the air and both men fell into its arms willingly.

"Spock!" Scott whispered into an upswept ear. He pushed gently on the thin shoulders and Spock looked at him, falling again into those yellow orbs. Scott smiled and led Spock by the hand toward the bed where he lay down face first and waited.

Spock trembled as the beautiful body was laid out before him like some sacrifice. He gently lowered himself until he pressed, length for length, against Scott's back. Long legs opened, wider, and Spock's organ slipped easily into the cleft of the strong buttocks. Both moaned at the sensation. Spock knew he was near to bursting, but held off, wanting to sink into the warmth he knew awaited him.

"Scott?" he asked softly, anxiously.

In answer, Scott rose onto his knees, head pressed into the pillows, legs spread wide. He undulated once, caused Spock's penis to rake the length of the crevice it rested in, caused it to fall free. Spock gasped. His hand reached for Scott, caressing the tender flesh of the cheeks, seeking further inward, finding what he sought and inserting one finger, then two, dilating the orifice, preparing it.

"Spock!" Scott whispered the name, though he'd intended it as a scream. His arousal was painful. He reached back and touched Spock's hot organ, nudging it until it rested against the opening. Then, with one strong thrust backward, he sheathed Spock within his body, his muscles gripping and caressing.

A low sound escaped Spock then and he lost all care for propriety and slowness. He began to thrust into Scott, knowing only that he needed satisfaction, that he wanted to fuck Scott until neither of them could walk or stand or sit.

It didn't take long until Spock erupted, taking Scott with him. He froze for one long moment on that blissful edge as he pumped his pent-up seed deep

into the other man. Then he slumped, found himself turned and held against a lightly haired chest.

"Spock?" Scott's voice was soft, concerned. "Are you all right?"

Spock nodded. "It has been...a very long time. Did I harm you?"

"No."

"Good." Spock kissed Scott's chest, feeling his penis still half erect, knowing he'd want another encounter very soon. He ran a hand down the taut belly and found Scott still half aroused as well. He smiled. Five days wouldn't be hard at all to fill.

Kirk's first thought was, *So this is what Spock's tastes are like....* His second was *Maybe I should ask them to join us?* He turned to the beautiful woman across the table from him and saw her also looking toward the doorway to the restaurant. He smiled at her and received a glory of white teeth and dimpled cheeks in return.

"Go ahead, ask them to join us," Marissa's voice sent a chill running down Kirk's sides, even after having been cooped up together in a hotel room for five days straight.

"Sure you don't mind?"

"Of course not. I'd love to meet your Mr. Spock."

Kirk smiled again and rose, approaching Spock and his companion.

Spock saw him coming, had seen Kirk and the woman sitting there only moments before Kirk saw him. He'd just been contemplating the advisability of leaving the establishment when Kirk rose from his chair and approached them. He had no choice and, looking toward Scott, realized that the young man would have probably killed him had he turned and left.

"Captain," Spock greeted.

"Good to see you, Mr. Spock." Kirk turned expectantly toward Scott.

"Scott, this is Captain James Kirk. Captain, Tascotg'ofnai."

Scott reached out a hand to Kirk. "Scott," he corrected the introduction. "Spock's the only person I've met who can pronounce the full name!"

Kirk shook the young man's hand and smiled, glancing toward Spock. "His is a mouthful, too."

Scott laughed, patting Spock lightly on the arm. "Sure is!"

Kirk couldn't decide if he'd made a mistaken double-entendre or not so he simply skimmed right over Scott's comment. "Would you care to join us, gentlemen?"

Knowing Scott was all but dancing to get the chance to speak with Kirk, Spock nodded. "If it is no intrusion."

"Of course not. If it was, I wouldn't have asked." Kirk turned, motioning them to follow. Deft maneuvers placed Spock next to Marissa; Kirk across from the woman, Scott across from Spock. Having congratulated himself on seating, Kirk proceeded to introduce everyone then sat back to watch the interplay between the strange group.

Marissa, a highly intelligent woman, was soon deep in conversation with Spock over some theory or other that left Kirk and Scott dangling behind. Kirk winked at Scott and began to inquire about the young man's life. Soon, they were deep into their own conversation about different class vessels and the latest in sports model ships.

"Excuse me," a perfectly pitched voice cut into both conversations with practiced adeptness. It was the waiter. "Would you care to order?"

Spock glanced at Kirk with a raised eyebrow. "Captain?"

Kirk smiled, recognizing the maneuver as Spock's way of asking for help. He turned to Scott. "Do you drink?"

Scott smiled back. "Quite often."

"Good." He turned back to the waiter. "We'll start with a bottle of Vazilik ...all around, I think." He looked at Spock questioningly. The Vulcan nodded. "All around." He then ordered for Marissa and himself, letting Spock take over at that point.

Spock ordered for both Scott and himself as Kirk looked on, watching closely as Spock's eyes met and held Scott's, only looking at the waiter when he was finished. Again, that curious irritation rose inside Kirk. He tried to look at it, couldn't, and shoved it away in distaste.

"You're on your way home?" Marissa asked Scott.

Scott nodded. "For a visit only. I'll be returning to Terra in four months."

"School?"

"Graduate studies at the TSC."

"Really? How interesting for you." Marissa glanced at Kirk, noted his distracted expression and turned toward Spock. "Did you study at the TSC when you were on Earth, Mr. Spock?"

Spock glanced away from Kirk, whom he'd been watching for some minutes, knowing something was bothering his friend, not knowing exactly what that something

was. "I was fortunate in that I took several advanced courses at the TSC during my last year at Starfleet Academy. An excellent teaching establishment."

"You're both lucky. I never got that far. Often wish I had."

"If you don't mind my asking," Scott said, "what is your field?"

Both Spock and Kirk looked sharply at Scott, a small gasp escaping Kirk.

Marissa laughed at both of them and at Scott's naivete in asking. "I'm a private teacher at Starbase Twelve."

"You are?" Kirk asked, surprised. "You didn't tell me."

"You didn't ask," Marissa chastised.

Kirk blushed slightly. "Guess we were both a bit preoccupied."

Scott laughed, low and clear. "Understandable." He was looking directly at Kirk who looked quickly toward Spock to find the Vulcan also watching him.

"It's often far too long between shore leaves," Spock commented, still watching Kirk.

"I bet," Marissa agreed, reaching across the table to take Kirk's hand that rested on the cloth.

Conversation was again interrupted when the waiter brought the wine. When it took up again, Marissa was again engaging Spock in scientific theories and Scott had Kirk discoursing about the ENTERPRISE.

The evening went smoothly from that point. The food was excellent, wine conducive to the food and atmosphere, and the company seemed to be perfect. Scott had Kirk so thoroughly entrenched in discussing the workings of a Starship that when Marissa took his hand again, he nearly pulled away in shock. He'd forgotten she was there.

"It's getting very late," Marissa reminded.

Kirk glanced at the chronometer on his wrist. "It is, isn't it?"

"I had a wonderful time," Scott added.

"Most fascinating," Spock agreed, standing up after Kirk had. He moved behind Marissa to hold her chair as she rose, glancing with a slight smile at Kirk who smiled back, amused at Spock's attention to the woman. Before Kirk could stop him, Spock had leaned over and punched his credit code into the table's small computer. Kirk's smile grew and he shook his head.

"Vulcan reflexes," Spock commented.

"Right," Kirk murmured. "In that case, give me a chance to treat you

tomorrow."

Spock looked to Scott who was nearly bouncing at the idea. "Very well."

"I'll get in touch with you tomorrow then. Uh, where are you staying?"

"Jaynard Towers."

"Nice."

"You?"

"The Foyin."

"Also very lovely."

Kirk took Marissa's arm and began walking toward the exit. He could feel Spock only feet behind him, could feel that other presence as well. Irritation rose once more. This time, he couldn't push it away. He shivered slightly, gnashing his teeth to keep from clenching his fists in frustration.

They left the restaurant and stood on the semi-quiet street beneath an overhanging tree. Marissa shook Scott's hand, nodded to Spock then began to move off in the direction of Kirk's hotel, walking a few yards down the street then stopping. Scott followed her example, shaking Kirk's hand and thanking him again for the company, then moving off to give the two friends some room alone.

"He's a wonderful kid, Spock."

"Yes. A friend." Spock cocked his head to the right, looking intently at Kirk who was looking down the street toward Scott. "What is it, Jim?"

Kirk looked back at him. "Nothing," he smiled.

"Jim...."

"Really, it's nothing." He reached to touch Spock's shoulder, squeezing lightly then letting his arm drop back to his side. "I guess I'll see you tomorrow."

"I also enjoyed Marissa's company."

"She's a nice lady, all right."

"Then we will see you both tomorrow."

Kirk shook his head. "Marissa's leaving tomorrow afternoon. Afraid you'll just be stuck with me."

"That should prove to be no great difficulty," Spock teased.

Kirk smiled, squeezed Spock's shoulder once more. "Good night, Spock."

"Good night." Spock stood a moment, watching Kirk move toward the waiting woman, watching as he put his arm around her shoulders and started walking, her

arm going around his waist. Something pulled at him, an irritation on the periphery of his consciousness. He shook it off and went to join Scott.

The walk back to the hotel was very pleasant. Kirk found himself replaying the conversation with the young Kasimari. Marissa remained silent, a warm presence against his side.

Scott was a beautiful man; his yellow/gold, pupilless eyes and shaggy, auburn hair creating an extremely striking impression. He was as tall as Spock, yet broader in his bone structure. The mind that went with those beautiful looks only increased Scott's attractiveness. Kirk found himself appreciating Spock's choice more than he'd thought possible.

It wasn't that he'd never admitted that another male can be beautiful in face and form. A beautiful face was a beautiful face no matter what that face possessed below the neck. But, for the first time that he could remember, Kirk found himself appreciating more than just the aesthetics of another male. There was a barely banked sexuality about the man. A feline quality that drew Kirk to him. He'd been so enthralled in Scott's conversation that he'd forgotten Marissa and Spock were also at the table. He couldn't remember ever forgetting Spock's presence before; a woman, from time to time, but never Spock. This was something new, something he'd think about...later.

But his mind wouldn't let go of the subject. He couldn't sidestep the still-present fact of his constant irritation all evening. No, he thought. *Not all evening. Not until Spock showed up with Scott. So, I should probably conclude that Scott...or Spock...is the source of the irritation.* He didn't like that thought at all. *Not Spock. Scott then?* He continued to walk beside Marissa, continued to put one foot in front of the other, but he was completely unaware of where he went or who was with him. *Jealousy, J.T.? Of Spock?* Then he remembered McCoy's words. *'If you know you can't love Spock that way, don't drag it out. Give him a chance for love somewhere else. He needs it.'* Yeah, he needs it, all right. *And maybe he's found it. If he's not exactly in love with that kid, then maybe he should be. But that didn't ring true either. Should be? For who's sake, J.T.? His or yours?*

A nudge on his arm stopped him before he passed the entrance to the hotel. Marissa smiled at him, her eyes concerned, her brow creased. "You okay?"

Kirk forced a smile. "Sure. Why wouldn't I be?"

"You were 'wool-gathering' again." Her smile disappeared. "You look troubled, Jim. Please, if I can help, let me."

He nodded and entered the lift. They didn't speak again until they were inside his room. The night was as dark as it gets on Paris; the reflection of all the lights glaring off the low cloud cover, causing a rainbowed haze to gather like some iridescent curtain outside the wide windows. Kirk stepped to see the

view, his back turned to his companion.

"Would you like to be alone?" she asked softly.

He turned then, his eyes gentle, still troubled. "No."

"Then talk to me. It'll help."

He smiled, took her in his arms and buried his face in her thick, blond hair.

"It's Spock, isn't it?" she whispered, her arms wrapping protectively around him.

He pulled back enough to look into her eyes. "What makes you say that?"

She shrugged. "He's very important to you. Even though you didn't really talk to each other much tonight, it was obvious. To me and to Scott." She brushed the hair from his forehead. "Jim, I'd be the first person to testify to your heterosexuality, but I'd also be the first to admit that you don't love me. You may like me just fine...and that feeling is returned in full. But you don't love me, you don't even know me. You had no idea that I don't take up with Starship captains every day, that I'm a teacher, here on vacation. But, it's obvious that you know Spock better than you know anyone and that he knows you the same way. To me, that spells love."

Kirk held her again, closing his eyes as he did. "Of course I love Spock. He's my best friend."

"Then what's bothering you?"

Kirk swallowed, thought of the pros and cons of talking it out with this beautiful, compassionate stranger. It didn't matter either way. He'd never see Marissa again after tomorrow....

"A few months back, Spock and I were in a...tight situation. His means of getting both of us out of that situation in one piece relied on the fact that he's bisexual. I hadn't known about it until that moment. I mean, sex was never a subject between us. It never entered into my mind that he...."

"That he's as sexual a being as anyone?"

"No. I guess not. But, after the surprise of his being bisexual was gone -- which only took a few minutes -- I felt...hurt, I guess. A person's sexuality is a large part of who they are, of what they are. I thought I knew Spock so well. Then to find out I'd never even known about such a large part of what makes him who he is...."

Marissa moved away, still holding Kirk's hand, and sat with him on the couch. She held his hand in her lap, tracing the strong lines of his fingers with her own as she spoke. "Has he changed?"

"No."

"Have you learned anything about him that's changed how you feel about him, how you see him, your trust in him?"

"No."

"Then why are you upset?"

"I'm not. Not really. I'm disappointed that there was a secret like that between us."

"Jim, do you truly think that it was an easy thing for him to tell you? 'Good morning, Captain. Here are the reports you requested. By the way, I'm bisexual'? Be realistic, Jim. He's a Vulcan. You, more than anyone, would know how reticent they are."

"I do know. I understand all that. I honestly don't know why I'm feeling...." He was at a loss to describe the feelings churning inside him.

"Betrayed?" Marissa suggested.

"Betrayed? I don't know. Maybe."

"How has he betrayed you?"

"He held something back.... I know that's not fair, but...."

"What was it he held back? The information that he's bisexual?"

"No. That doesn't matter."

Marissa remained quiet now, allowing Kirk's own thoughts to form.

"I think it's mostly that I didn't even know he was sexual," Kirk continued. "I mean, actively sexual. My frame of reference is different now. I knew where he fit in my life, now...." Again, he lost his words.

"Now you aren't so sure? Has he given you any reason to question his regard for you?"

"No. But my CMO suggested...." He drew a deep breath. "The doctor told me that since Spock and I have such a good friendship, a more complete relationship wouldn't be such an unimaginable thing. He also suggested that Spock might feel like he does about Scott toward me."

"I doubt that."

Kirk looked at her questioningly.

"Spock likes Scott, I'm certain of that. But they're basically strangers, not unlike you and I are. There is nothing in his relationship with Scott that even resembles how he feels about you."

"Which is?"

"He loves you."

"I'm his friend."

"Yes. He loves you...just like you love him."

Kirk looked up at her sharply, eyes narrowed.

"You have a lot of thinking to do, don't you?" Marissa asked, rising from the couch and gathering up her cloak. She began to move toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To pack."

"You don't leave until 1600 tomorrow."

"I know, but I think we've spent enough time together. I'm not what you need tonight, Jim."

He nodded then took her in his arms and kissed her deeply. "Thank you, Marissa." He looked at her quizzically. "Hey, just what kind of teacher are you, anyway?"

"I teach Xenopsychology at the Center for Interspecies Studies on Starbase Twelve."

"Good. For a moment I thought you'd been practicing without a license." He hugged her then let her go.

"Try to get some sleep tonight, Jim. You need it."

"By, Marissa. And...thanks."

She smiled, kissed his cheek, and left.

Spock sat back in the comfortable chair and watched and listened as Kirk and Scott talked. It was amazing how he could have missed it before.... *Or perhaps not...he thought to himself. Self-delusion is becoming habit with you lately.* Despite the physical differences, despite Kirk's smoothness as opposed to Scott's sharp lines and angles, the resemblance was unbelievable. That two beings could exist, so opposite to one another, yet so alike, amazed and confounded Spock. That he could find two such individuals among millions.... Well, he didn't even want to think about that.

In the years Spock had known Jim Kirk, he'd rarely seen anyone engage him in conversation who could keep up with Kirk's quick, fertile mind. Scott not only kept up, he sometimes passed him by. And Kirk seemed to love it.

A game of wits had developed between the two of them over dinner and continued now in the bar in Kirk's hotel. Who knew more about this planet's pre-Federation history; who had climbed the higher mountain; who knew more about Aldeberan wines. It had gone on and on in amiable competition. Then the topic of conversation had turned to Spock and he felt himself at once drawing closer to them and drawing back. He listened with a highly curious, mildly flattered, extremely apprehensive air.

"He's the best chess player in Starfleet," Kirk offered with a glance at Spock.

"Knows more about astrophysics than the entire VSA," Scott countered.

"Spock has a wonderful sense of humor."

Scott nodded. "Dry, almost English, Terran." He paused, eyeing Kirk with a grin. "He plays his lyre wonderfully...I'm sure."

"Quite true," Kirk confirmed. "He knows over sixty different languages."

Scott looked at Spock with admiration. "And I only speak three." He smiled and winked at Kirk. "He has a small mole on his...."

"Scott!" Spock dropped his right hand onto the table surface, causing a loud slap.

"Just seeing if you were paying attention," Scott laughed.

Kirk grinned and sipped from his wine glass. "That mole is on his left hip," Kirk said.

Scott laughed harder, and yet harder when he looked at the expression on Spock's face.

"Perhaps this...competition has gone far enough," Spock suggested, his best 'I-am-a-Vulcan-and-I-am-not-amused' look firmly in place.

"He hates being the center of attention," Kirk giggled, re-filling his glass from their third bottle of wine.

"Not all the time," Scott stage-whispered back.

"Oh?" Kirk leaned in toward Scott, motioning with his index finger for Scott to lean closer as well. "And just when is it that he does enjoy being the center of attention?"

"Gentlemen..." Spock warned.

Scott ignored him. "Just about anytime we're alone. But then, if he's not the center of attention then, I must be and I like it even less than he does, so he usually gets star billing."

"Scott...." Spock tried again.

"He doesn't seem to mind in the least, either," Scott continued.
"Especially when I'm licking his...."

Spock was out of his chair and had his hand over Scott's mouth instantly.
"Stop this!" He glowered first at Scott then at Kirk, then, seeing that his words meant little to the two drunken men, he added, "Please?" He released Scott's mouth but not before the Kasimari kissed his palm.

Kirk grinned at them. He tried to look serious and turned back to Scott.
"Lick his what?"

"Jim!"

"Scienstifis...." He shut his eyes and tried again. "Scientific curiosity, Mr. Spock." He grinned proudly at having spoken coherently.

"This is not a lab, Captain, and I am not an experiment."

"Get's huffy, doesn't he?" Scott asked Kirk.

Kirk shook his head, perfectly serious. "Never. Well, almost never."

"Would you two kindly quiet yourselves at least?" Spock pleaded, reseating himself across the glass table from the two humans.

"Oh, were we speaking too loudly?" Kirk asked. "We didn't know we were, did we, Scott?"

Scott shook his head and reached for more wine.

"And do you truly need more of that?" Spock inquired with a sigh.

"Definitely," Kirk informed him, re-filling both his and Scott's glass. He put the bottle down, then picked it up again, topping off Spock's glass as well.
"Drink up, Mr. Spock. Don't spoil the party."

"If someone does not stay relatively sober, we'll end up sleeping in the local police station."

"Worry, worry, worry," Scott murmured.

"Yeah, don't worry, Spock. You can stay in my room tonight. No sweat."

Spock actually rolled his eyes and sat back, awaiting the inevitable continuation of their drunken conversation.

"He's a damn good kisser," Scott began again.

Kirk regarded Spock with a scientist's eye. Spock ducked his head and drank his wine in one swallow, re-filling his glass immediately. "I always assumed he would be," Kirk said. "He's the best at everything he does. Probably damn good in bed, too."

Spock couldn't believe what he'd heard. He looked, completely shocked, into Kirk's hazed eyes, mouth slightly open, eyebrow gone beneath his bangs. When he spoke, his voice was a choked whisper. "Jim!"

Kirk shrugged. "Well, I'm right, aren't I?"

"Most definitely," Scott murmured. His voice was once again under control, the slur of wine nearly gone.

Kirk nodded, face serious, and sipped at his wine.

Spock's face said, 'How can you do this to me?' Kirk saw it but didn't respond. Somewhere inside his mind, he knew he'd hurt Spock. But that didn't seem as important as the fact that he now knew that his friend truly was getting what he needed. He was somewhat surprised to find out that he'd been concerned. After having met Scott and seeing them together, one would have thought he'd need no further proof. Apparently, he'd been wrong.

Suddenly, Kirk smiled. "He makes a good gangster, too."

"A gangster?" Scott smiled, intrigued.

For the next forty-five minutes, Kirk related their time on Iotia, enhanced here and there by Kirkian impression and interpretation. The two men laughed and drank and laughed some more, the previous tension seemingly melted away.

Finally, both Kirk and Scott looked like they'd fall asleep where they sat any minute and Spock called a halt to the festivities.

Taking Scott by the arm, he drew him to his feet, supported him against his right side. Then he did the same with Kirk and began the journey upward to Kirk's rooms. Once in the elevator, he leaned against the back wall. Scott curled against him, chin on Spock's shoulder, while Kirk simply leaned against whatever part of his friend he could reach. Identical grins were on both faces.

The lift deposited them on Kirk's floor and Spock turned to the left.

"Other way," Kirk murmured.

"What?"

"It's the other way."

"Room 1815 is this way, Jim."

"My room's 1851," Kirk stated, looking blearily up at Spock.

"You said 1815 before."

"Was wrong, wasn't I?"

Again, Spock rolled his eyes and turned his burdens in the opposite direction. Scott just went along meekly, content to nuzzle Spock's neck.

Room 1851 was reached without further incident. The task of coding the lock was next.

"What is your code, Jim?" Spock asked, expecting to have to ask at least three more times before they gained access to the rooms.

"Pon Farr," Kirk murmured.

Spock stared at him, too much in shock to disbelieve him. He coded in the Standard translation and the door opened. He made a mental note to discuss Kirk's choice of codes when his captain was sober.

Once inside, he released his hold on Kirk who automatically moved toward the bedroom and plopped, face-down, on the large bed. Spock followed, easing Scott onto the other side of the mattress. He then went to Kirk and turned him onto his back, then swung his legs fully onto the bed. He stood back and looked at the two of them. It was a disgustingly human sight. He didn't blame either man for their present state; rather, he envied them their ability to so totally abandon themselves, to so totally relax.

He sighed again and proceeded to undress Kirk, then Scott and place them under the covers. He sat in a chair beside the bed and watched them. He sat there all night as first one then the other tossed and turned. Finally, Scott opened one eye, looked around then rose with amazing speed and headed for the bathroom. Spock heard the sounds of sickness and shook his head, somewhere inside thinking that it served him right. Minutes later, Scott returned, hair slightly damp. He passed Spock, patting the Vulcan's head as he did, and crawled back in bed. He was asleep in seconds.

For an hour, there was no movement in the room aside from the breathing of the three men. Then Kirk began to murmur in his sleep, then toss. This went on for nearly fifteen minutes. Then he curled tightly against Scott, who turned into the embrace, and settled to sleep again.

Spock watched, charmed in an odd way by the two men huddled together in drunken sleep. No jealousy of Kirk touching Scott or of Scott touching Kirk rose in him. He was slightly surprised to find that he wasn't jealous. He'd expected to be. *Plan for the worst, he told himself, then everything after that is, as McCoy might say, gravy.* He continued to watch through Pari's long night and into the early morning hours. At 0700, he rose, went to clean up, then left them to order breakfast, knowing they would both need nutrition when they finally woke.

Light pierced Kirk's skull as he fumbled his way toward the bathroom. He found the shower by touch and turned it on cold and hard. He stepped under the spray and let it pound on his neck, working out the kinks, easing the headache that he knew wouldn't leave him for the rest of the day.

A pounding on the door made him turn the spray off and step out of the

stall. "Jim?" It was Scott. "You almost done?"

"Just a second," Kirk called, grabbing a towel and starting to dry his hair. He continued to rub at it and drip on the carpet as he hit the release panel and the door slipped open. He peered at Scott from underneath the towel, a wry grin creasing his face.

"Morning," Scott whispered.

"You look like shit, young man," Kirk whispered back.

"With good reason as I recall," Scott blinked at him.

"With very good reason," a third voice assured them both. Spock stood in the doorway, looking at them. Only he noticed that both men were stark naked, and his only comment was a raised eyebrow. "Breakfast will be here shortly," he looked each of them up and down once then turned and left.

"Think he's mad?" Scott asked.

Kirk shrugged. "Don't know. I truly just don't know."

Spock wasn't mad, he was amused. The sight of those two beautiful bodies standing in the steamy bathroom, one dripping wet, tickled him. His perfect memory of their conversation last night didn't even diminish the fondness the scene he had just witnessed created. If he didn't know before why he'd stayed in service with humans, he knew now. Often it was like serving with a ship full of children; undisciplined, affectionate, unselfconscious, endearing, abandoned, and just plain...fun. He shook his head at his own thoughts and went to open the door for the food service.

Spock had just closed the door again when Kirk crawled out of the bedroom wrapped in a bathrobe. His eyes weren't fully open and he kept his head tilted away from the open window. He nodded to Spock and gratefully accepted the offered cup of coffee.

"Thanks," he murmured, sitting on the sofa.

"You're quite welcome."

Kirk drank half the cup before speaking again. "I meant, thanks for getting me up here last night, not just for the coffee."

"It was no trouble."

Kirk looked at him disbelievingly.

"It wasn't too much trouble," Spock amended. "I couldn't just leave you

in the bar, could I?"

"I suppose not. Wouldn't look too good, would it?"

Spock shook his head, his eyes smiling.

"Uh, Spock?"

"Yes, Jim?"

"I'm sorry if I got out of hand last night, said some things I shouldn't have."

"There is nothing to apologize for. No offense was taken since none was meant."

Kirk nodded, drank the rest of the coffee and let Spock take his cup to re-fill it. "Sometimes I drink too much and, if the company is right, my mouth turns to sludge."

"And the company was right last night?"

Kirk glanced at him, still squinting against the light. He nodded.

"I assume you both had a good time."

"It would kinda be a shame if we didn't, wouldn't it?" Kirk laughed lightly, then regretted it as his head protested. He grabbed the top of it as if to keep it on his shoulders.

"With breakfast, I ordered some Aspirophryn."

"What I really need are a couple of hangover pills."

"That is what Aspirophryn is."

"Oh. Thanks." He took the two pills from Spock along with his fresh cup of coffee and drank them down.

"You'll feel better in a few moments. Then you must eat."

Kirk glared at Spock then at the food then closed his eyes. "I know I'm not dying, but I sure do feel like it."

"Don't be so sure you're not," Scott stood just inside the doorway, hand protecting his eyes from the sunlight. "I'm convinced I died last night."

"You were sick last night," Spock told him. "But you most definitely did not die. I watched to make sure."

Scott grinned at him, walked across the room and placed a kiss on the Vulcan's lips. "thank you. It's nice to know that, had I died last night, you

would have been there to see it."

A muffled snort came from across the room.

"You don't look so great yourself, Jim." Scott fetched a cup of coffee and sat on the other end of the sofa from Kirk.

"You both look...." Spock thought to say 'incredibly beautiful', but thought better of it. "...dreadful."

"I'm sure we both feel it, Mr. Spock," Kirk assured him, handing Scott two pills. It was too difficult to think clearly. It hurt to even get his hand to move without dumping the pills on the floor, let alone analyze the myriad thoughts bumping around in his wine-hazed mind. He started to shrug, thought better of it, and settled back against the sofa, shutting his eyes against the sun, against his own thoughts.

Scott took the pills and closed his eyes as well, waiting for them to take effect. He sighed as the relief washed over him, making his eyes small fires compared to the fire storms they'd been moments before. When he opened them again, it was to find Spock watching Kirk in that same way that he'd noticed before; as though Kirk was made of plaster and the rest of the universe was corrosive water, trying to wear him down. He smiled to himself at the thought. No doubt, Spock was extremely protective, extremely fond of his captain. It made Scott feel better, knowing he'd never see Spock again after the following day, that Kirk would still be there for the Vulcan. He hated to think of the loneliness he knew lived in Spock. It was a great comfort to know that he had someone to throw some light into his continual darkness.

"What are you thinking?" Spock's voice was soft, gentle.

Scott looked at him. "About you."

"What about me?"

The Kasimari glanced at Kirk, then back to Spock, a small smile on his lips. "I'm glad you have a friend, Spock."

Spock watched the young man for long moments. "I understand."

"Do you?"

Spock nodded, holding out a hand.

Scott went to Spock, sitting in the large chair beside Spock, resting his head on the Vulcan's shoulder. "I'll miss you."

Spock ran his fingers through the long, auburn hair but remained silent.

"I'll never see you again, you know," Scott muttered into the cloth covering Spock's arm.

"It is a very large galaxy," Spock agreed. "You will meet many people in

your life. You'll forget...."

"I'll never forget you, or Jim. Never."

"So young," Spock whispered.

Scott looked at him, yellow eyes brimming. "Is that so wrong?"

Spock shook his head. "No. In you, it is so right."

"Like him," Scott said, nodding toward an oblivious Kirk. "Still the idealist, even after everything he's seen and done."

"Yes, very much like him."

"I take that as an extreme compliment coming from you."

"It's a compliment for anyone to compare you to Jim Kirk. He's a fine man."

Scott leaned in to hug the Vulcan. Spock shifted, drawing Scott close to his chest, leaning his chin on the top of the auburn covered head.

"I'm sorry," Scott whispered, his voice breaking slightly.

Spock stroked the burnt-leaf hair. "For what?"

"That you love him so much and he doesn't know it."

Spock's eyes shut, his lip trembled. He couldn't speak.

"You should tell him, Spock."

"No." The word was barely audible, even to the one pressed to the Vulcan's chest.

"Is it such a risk? Would it be so awful, so much worse if he knew? You're living in hell as it is. What could be worse?"

"His pity. His scorn. The accusation in his eye. Nothing is worth risking those things."

Scott rubbed his cheek against Spock's chest. "And that's why I'm sorry, Spock."

Spock swallowed. "Thank you for that."

"I'll miss you," Scott repeated, starting to doze in the comfortable embrace.

Kirk remained still, utterly silent. It was too late to let the other two men know he wasn't asleep, but wide awake. He had no choice but to remain still and listen...or try not to. But it was impossible. The quiet, intimate words resounded like thunder through the still room, through his aching head. He listened, heard the rustle of fingers through hair, of cloth crushing cloth, skin pressed to skin. He trembled slightly, tried to control it, listened. Words meant for no one but Spock and Scott penetrated him like lightning, bringing his own selfish, stubborn pride into full focus, screaming to him that he never wanted to be responsible for pain like that that he heard now in Spock's voice. It crushed him utterly to know he was the source of such pain.

I don't pity you, Spock! Kirk's conscious screamed at him. I envy you. Look at you, you care for that boy. In three weeks I won't know what Marissa looks like...if I remember her name. And you, you'll be able to recall every detail of Scott's voice, his face, every word he spoke to you when you're one hundred and eleven years old! You may not allow yourself to feel too often, my friend, but when you do, you feel hard. And me? I'm just the same old shit I've always been, stomping all over your feelings, treating you like we're just buddies, like there's nothing unique or special between us. I've been crude, Spock. I've mistreated our friendship. And I think it's time I do as Bones said: admit I can love you like you need to be loved or really set you free.

As he listened, the clarity of Spock's feelings amazed him. How anyone could be so sure of anything was purely amazing. He'd loved before, but it had always been transitory to one degree or another. But this, this feeling, whatever it happened to be, that he had for Spock had been solid, unwavering except to grow, for years. As he sat silently listening to Scott's even breathing, to the delicate sound of fingers sliding through long hair, he tested that unnamed feeling, tested it in every way he knew.

He thought of every scenario possible: Spock naked before him; Spock submissive; Spock commanding; Spock fucking him into the ground. And the possible embarrassments: the crew finding out, their reactions; Command finding out; Spock's parents finding out. It went on and on in his mind. His feelings remained true. In each case he found a reason to explain Spock's behavior or to justify their relationship. No matter how he tried, he couldn't make loving Spock dirty or degrading, he couldn't turn it into some stereotypical cartoon of two fags humping each other. It wasn't like that. It would never be like that...no matter what they did, how they felt. Their love would never be crude.

And as he thought that, knew in his soul that he truly was thinking clearly and honestly, he knew he loved Spock as he'd never loved anyone else. And here I am, causing him pain, making him suffer because I don't have guts enough to talk to him. No, instead of asking him into my arms, I thrust him into Scott's.... The thought of the young Kasimari brought him up short. What if that's all he can handle, shore leave affairs? He's already quoted Starfleet regs to me about fraternization.... What if his love for me is as impossible as he thinks it is simply because rules prohibit that love? He's awfully definite about following those damn regulations....

Putting the cart before the horse again, J.T.? Take one step at a time.

Talk to him, then worry about practicalities.

He let his breathing quicken slightly, let one arm move restlessly against the sofa. Finally, he opened his eyes as though waking from a deep sleep. His eyes fell on the sight of Spock sitting in a large chair, holding a drowsing Scott almost in his lap, against his chest. His heart skipped a beat at the tenderness on Spock's face, then caught in his throat when he realized that tenderness wasn't intended for Scott but for himself as their eyes met and locked.

Kirk managed a smile and nodded his understanding to his friend. Everything would be all right, he could see it in those deep, brown eyes, could feel it in the rapport that stretched across the room to enfold them in a cocoon neither could break free of even if he'd wished to try.

"You okay?" Kirk looked across the chess board at Spock.

An eyebrow rose, Spock nodded. He moved his knight.

Kirk leaned back, forgetting the game for a moment. "You don't act like you're okay, Spock."

"I'm fine, Jim."

Kirk sighed, leaned into the game again, studying the board. "For someone who's fine, Mr. Spock, you're playing a lousy game." He moved his king. "Checkmate. That's my third game in two days."

"Your game is improving," Spock stated, setting the pieces back to their starting positions.

"No. Yours just sucks."

Spock looked up in shock.

Kirk grinned. "Thought that might get your attention. Why don't we forget about chess and talk for a while?"

Spock nodded, folding his hands in front of him, elbows on the arms of his chair. "What would you like to talk about?"

Kirk leaned on his elbows on the edge of the table. "I'd like to listen... to whatever you'd like to tell me. What's bothering you?"

Spock realized it would be useless to continue to deny that he was disturbed. And he wasn't fully certain he wanted to deny it any longer.

"You miss Scott?" Kirk suggested.

Spock glanced at him, a slight green infusing his cheeks and ear tips. "Perhaps that is part of it."

Kirk regrouped. He'd expected resistance. Now he chose his words with infinite care and delicacy. "When you've gotten used to.... When you've grown accustomed to fairly regular...release, it's sometimes hard to...reaccustom yourself to...."

Spock smiled slightly. "I am not suffering from sexual frustration, Jim."

"Oh," Kirk sighed. He grinned sheepishly and shrugged. "Good."

"But a certain...fondness had developed between Tascotg'ofrai and myself. A small amount of time to readjust to his absence is expected."

"Does this happen often? I mean, do you always have such strong...emotional attachments to your...friends?" He used a slightly strange emphasis on the word 'friend', leaving no doubt in Spock's mind as to what he meant.

"I have been known to engage...intimately with individuals whom I do not grow...fond of. This is a most unusual case. In fact, it's never happened before."

"Have you fallen in love with him?" Kirk held his breath hoping that he hadn't stepped on those sensitive Vulcan toes.

Spock met his eyes. "No. I am not in love with Scott."

Kirk read something unspoken in those eyes, something he hoped he read correctly. "Have you ever been in love, Spock?"

Spock continued to hold Kirk's gaze. "Once."

"Did it end painfully?"

"It...has had no end."

"Then you're still in love with this person? Do you see...him often?" At the look on Spock's face, he blushed. "Sorry. Stupid question, wasn't it? I mean you've already told me that you don't...fraternize with the crew and who else could you possibly see often?"

"You are correct that I have not fraternized with the crew. But, yet, I am still in love with him and, yes, I see him very often."

Kirk's hopes surged. "Tell me."

Spock shook his head. "The risks are too high."

"Risks? Of pity, scorn, accusation?" Kirk asked, letting Spock know he'd been overheard with Scott.

"Yes. Just those things. I won't risk his opinion of me...or our friend-

ship."

"But, if you knew that those risks didn't exist, what would you do?"

Spock stared at him for a long time, then rose and leaned across the table. He leaned very close to Kirk, still looking into the hazel eyes. Then he moved yet closer, gently touching his lips to Kirk's.

"That, sir, is what I would do."

Kirk stared, unsure what to say or do.

"You're shocked," Spock stated.

Kirk shook his head 'no', then shrugged. "Maybe I am."

"You shouldn't be."

"No, I suppose not."

"What made you do it, Jim?"

Kirk shuddered. "I don't understand."

Spock shook his head. "Why? This is not your way. Why did you push me?"

"I don't know that 'this' isn't my way, Spock. I'd always thought I was pretty open-minded. Then...then I saw you with those Klingons and all the tasteless, filthy, ribald humor I've encountered about homosexuality over the years reared up in front of me. I couldn't equate you with any of that...didn't want to. But that's all I'd ever seen, Spock. I'd never seen what it would really be like between you and another male...another person. I'd never considered your sexuality before...before the Klingons. It all just sort of rushed at me too fast. I was stuck in bad parody, couldn't climb out of it. So, I took the easy way out and pretended nothing had changed."

"And now?"

"Now I've seen you with Scott."

Spock raised an eyebrow, indicating that that was no answer.

"I've seen how...gentle you can be. Oh, shit! I already knew how gentle you are, how loving and compassionate. I'd just never extended that knowledge into sexual areas before. I guess I had to see it with my own eyes before I'd believe it and forget all those terrible jokes."

"I see. But that still doesn't tell me why you've pushed me to admit something I had no intention of ever mentioning."

"I saw you hurting because of me and I had to ask myself if my inflicting that pain was the only way I could continue to be your friend." Kirk paused,

looked at his hands folded in his lap. "Bones told me to either love you or set you free. Well, I knew I'd have to cut you off completely, maybe even have you transfer, for you to ever really be free of me, of my possessiveness. Then I realized that distance wouldn't matter. And I was stuck for an answer. I mean, it wouldn't matter if we never saw each other again, we'd still be part of one another." He looked up at Spock then. "And I had my answer. I've loved many women in my life, been in love with a few. But I've never had someone be part of me before. You're part of who I am, what I am. Logically," he grinned nervously, "if I love myself at all, in any way, I have to love you, too. And since I've often made love to myself, it makes no sense that I'd be hesitant to make love with you." He looked back down to his hands. "The fact that you're male is irrelevant. I proved that to myself this shore leave. I'd spent half my time with Marissa. I enjoyed that time, but after five days alone with her, all I knew about her was her first name. After one hour with Scott, I knew nearly everything there was to know...or so it seemed. I started wondering just who, of the two of us, had made the better choice of companion.

"I admit that I was hurt when I found out I didn't know you as well as I'd thought I did. I wasn't bothered so much that you're bisexual as by the fact that I didn't know you were sexual at all! It was the secrecy that hurt."

"I understand," Spock whispered. "I really do. I regret causing you pain. There simply was no other choice. I couldn't tell you, Jim. I tried, many times. But the words wouldn't come out. I didn't know how to tell you. I regret deeply that you found out as you did."

"Me, too. But that's over."

"Is it?"

Kirk nodded. "I've seen you as you really are, not as I'd imagined from some unfortunate accident." He paused. "I'm very sorry I was insensitive to the fact that you'd been assaulted, Spock. I was an ass; the fact that I was terribly confused and not thinking clearly is no excuse. I wish I could have been the friend I'd like to think I am."

Spock reached a hand across the table, not quite touching the hand Kirk had rested there. "You are the best friend anyone could ever hope for, Jim. I know you're not perfect. I accept your humanity and the inconsistencies that go with it. That you found the situation easier to ignore than to deal with was not unexpected. I understood. I understand."

"That's more than I deserve."

Spock shook his head, lacing his fingers through Kirk's as the human placed his hand in Spock's. "You are more than I deserve."

Kirk smiled. "I'm not going to pretend that I'm not scared, Spock. I can't remember the last time I was this scared."

"You need not fear me, Jim."

"I don't. I'm afraid of...I don't know, being ignorant, I guess."

Spock smiled a true, if small, smile. "There is an easy way to cure that condition."

Kirk nodded and waited while Spock rounded the table, knelt on the floor beside him, turned Kirk's chair so that he could kneel between Kirk's legs. He reached up, took Kirk's face in his hands and drew their mouths together again. This time, Spock teased Kirk's lips until they opened to him and, when they did, plunged deeply inside, consecrating Kirk, breaking new ground.

When they parted, Kirk's head swam and he closed his eyes against the dizziness. He smiled, holding on to Spock's shoulders. He felt himself drawn against a hard chest, felt hot hands on his back, urging him to his feet. He followed where he was lead, not caring that he was completely out of control of himself. His tunic was lifted and removed. He was seated on the edge of the bed and his boots were taken. Then his trousers were gone. And, finally, the cool cabin air brushed the sensitive skin on his exposed, half erect penis. It wasn't the first time Spock had undressed him, but it was certainly the first time he'd been so conscious of him doing so.

He remained still, lying back on the bed, his eyes barely cracked. The little he saw made his skin flush. Spock stood before him, slowly undressing. He watched as each piece of clothing disappeared over Spock's shoulder, watched as each new area of skin was revealed. He expected revulsion. He felt lust, pure and simple. Spock was beautiful; copper and olive brushed with coal dust. Kirk shivered. And when he looked down and saw Spock's penis fully erect, he gasped, disbelieving that he could cause such a reaction in his Vulcan.

Spock moved toward him, knelt on the bed beside him, leaned forward and kissed him again, gently this time. Kirk melted into the bedding. He remained still as Spock's lips traced the lines of his muscles and bones down his neck to his arm then back again, ending at his lips once more. The action was repeated innumerable times, each time Spock left his mouth, he would venture further and further down Kirk's body until, finally, he kissed the head of Kirk's now fully aroused flesh.

Kirk jolted, cried out quietly. Spock gentled him back, straddled his legs, sitting back until his buttocks brushed Kirk's ankles. Kirk shivered yet again. Then all thought, all sensation fled to center in the pulsing flesh encased in Spock's hot mouth. He'd never felt anything like it. He glanced up once, but had to shut his eyes against the sight of what Spock was doing to him; it was too incredible, too beautiful to believe. He fought to remain still, to keep from thrusting up into that sucking warmth. He gave up, lifting his hips rhythmically, meeting Spock's timing, matching it, urging Spock to finish quickly.

But Spock had other plans. He released his hold on Kirk and gently placed his hands on Kirk's pelvic bones, pushing so that Kirk stopped thrusting. He smiled at Kirk's puzzled look, whispered reassurances.

"Be patient. Hush, Jim. Hush."

He leaned forward and kissed Kirk's parted lips, matching them chest to chest. He knelt, still kissing Kirk, one leg on either side of Kirk's hips.

Then, bracing himself on his hands, he began to lower himself toward Kirk's straining erection. He reached back once to guide Kirk, then let his body finish the job as gravity slowly pulled him downward.

Kirk's eyes were wide open, his forehead beaded in sweat, his tongue continually licking his lips. Breathing was harsh in the room, tension straining the tenuous control each had over his body, until, finally, Spock rested, sitting fully sheathed on Kirk. He shifted, settling their fit, cuddling Kirk's penis within himself like a toy. He smiled again, ran both palms over Kirk's chest, brushing the hard nipples. Spock continued to hold Kirk's eyes as he first lifted up slightly, then pushed back down. And again, further up, further down. Over and over the pattern was repeated until one stroke was simply too wonderful and he exploded, feeling Kirk pour his seed deep within his body. Spock's head fell back, his neck straining with release, his mouth open in a soundless cry. Kirk squeezed Spock's hips, moved further back to mold Spock around his emptying penis.

They froze, bodies emptied, souls finally full.

Spock eased back down, still holding Kirk within him. Half-opened eyes met Kirk's, met astonishment and unspeakable love. He smiled, clenched his buttocks once, causing Kirk to gasp and slap him gently on one hip.

"Tease," Kirk murmured, voice rough.

Spock raised his eyebrows.

Kirk moved, shifting Spock's weight, settling his hands on Spock's thighs. "Comfortable?" Spock nodded. "Me, too."

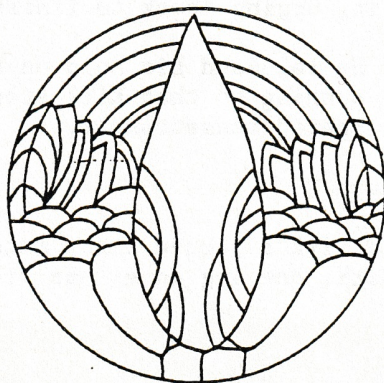
"I'm very glad," Spock whispered.

Kirk chuckled lightly, then, at Spock's quizzical look, explained. "Was just thinking that the air isn't always the air, and Bones should have been the first one to realize it."

Spock smiled and shook his head. "I don't understand."

"Everything has its compensation, Mr. Spock." Kirk's hands moved to Spock's damp penis and held it in his palm. "Some are better than others, that's all."

Spock shook his head again, but he didn't care that he wasn't following this always mercurial human. All he cared was that Kirk was his, as he always had been.



A QUIET CORNER IN HELL

Lingering here in Sickbay...twiddling my thumbs.
A starship Captain is nonessential personnel
In medical emergencies. Not that Bones would ever say so.
No, he lets me stay. And wait for what?

*Goddamned Vulcan idiot!
Saving my ass again at the cost of his own.
Doesn't he know what he meant to me?!
His death is ... unthinkable*

Unthinkable? Oh, really, Kirk.
And how many times has he almost died
Thanks to military necessity?
The necessity of following your orders?

*I can see him now ...
Regarding me gravely and raising that elegant eyebrow.
"Regret is illogical, Captain.
It was merely my duty."*

*But duty is a harsh mistress.
The lady's blind ...
Cold as marble and empty ...
Empty as a broken lyre.
And what did Carolyn Palamas think of duty
As she watched her adored Apollo
Fade to dust on the wind?*

Dust to dust.
And what shall I do when he is dust?

*Or a meal for another galactic amoeba ...
Or fodder for a Kingon's merciless mindsifter ...
Or a statistic of some less-than-successful encounter,
Some desperate mission*

Quit it, Kirk! How morbid can you get?
Rehashing those nastier nightmares

*The ones that tear your soul to shreds
In the insubstantial landscape of dreams ...
That wake you to icy sweats
And a hollow burning in the gut ...
That send you out, white and shaking,
To pace the empty corridors in the middle of the night....*

But ... this time I'm not dreams.

No. I'm caught in a numb place outside time ...
Falling on a cold and bitter wind
And screaming out to Anything that will listen
That I'll 'be good' if only ...

If only somebody'd come.
I hear the occasional swooshing
Of the door into the operating area ...
Hurried steps ... random phrases of medical terminology ...
And the soft plaint of the chronometer
Droning away on Bones' desk.
Like mindless insects
Crawling from one spot to the next,
The seconds drag their meticulous march
Across its face.

Time ... there's never enough of it.
Was I recklessly extravagant?
Too trusting of my special luck
And -- admit it, Kirk -- too scared
To chance revealing my private truth?
Spending the precious moments of his company
With a profligate's disregard ...
Assuming he'd always be there?
A fairly stupid assumption;
Space service is ever a risky business.
And even Vulcans aren't invincible.

Thank God for Bones.
He's a brilliant surgeon, the best in the Fleet,
And no one's more familiar
With that tricky hybrid physiology.
He's superbly trained ... completely dedicated ...
And he cares. He cares so much

So why am I chanting his qualifications
Like a kid rubbing a rabbit's foot

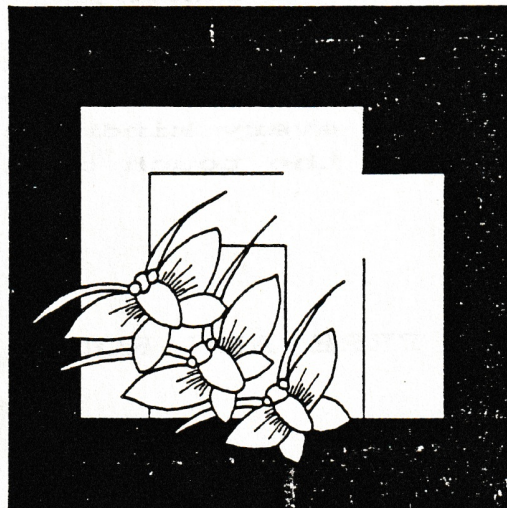
That one's easily answered:
I've lost too many loves.
My hostages to fortune tend to disappear.
I've endured those losses ...
But ... I could not bear his.

Spock ...
In whatever darkened tunnels of the mind
Your essence is entrapped,
Hear me now!
Once you swore an oath to me ...
A special Vulcan Oath of Loyalty.
And honor rarely extended,
And valued more highly by me
Than any other I had earned.
I hold you to that Oath, my friend.
You have not my leave to go.

Dearest Friend ...
I have placed within your keeping
The inner sanctum of my soul.
It is an irreparable gift ...
You are my last and greatest love.

Live, Spock,
Live ... and let me tell you.
Live ... LIVE ... LIVE

MEG FINE



OLD SOULS

They do not understand,
These newcomers.
They seek to label us,
To define us by their own outmoded morality.
Their souls are too young
To recognize our relationship
To them we are odd --
Traitors to our oaths.
It is foolish to expend our essence upon them
They have not the vision to survive.
To them love is circumscribed by sexuality.
Life, by physical sensations.
Why bother explaining
That love knows no dictionary
It is bound only by the narrowness
Of a lover's mind.
So it is that we are lovers --
Our spirits entwined in ethereal embraces,
Our bodies echoing that psychic closeness.
We see love in every kindness,
The passion hiding in the touch of a friend.

TERE ANN RODERICK

A FEW TOO MANY

A.L. Hughes

A few too many. Jim Kirk smiled to himself as he listened to McCoy's next tirade.

"I mean, really, Jim-Boy, what do we really know about these Vulcans? Too little, if you ask me!"

Nobody asked you. Outwardly, he said, "Bones, cut it! You're embarrassing Spock! Maybe it's time we took you back to your room. You've had a few too many." Kirk surveyed the small bar to see if anyone was listening.

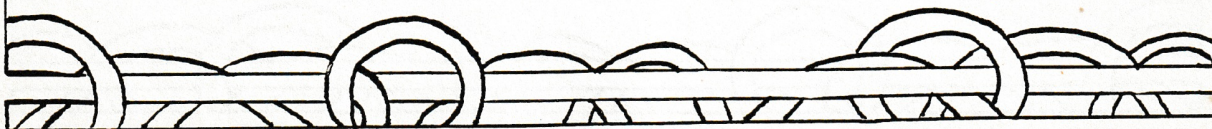
"A few too many?" McCoy rasped indignantly. He rose, almost falling, grabbing Spock's shoulder at the last moment to save himself, then sat back down with a thump.

Kirk sighed in dismay. *Now I'll never get him out of here. Maybe I can get him to change the subject.* Kirk looked tiredly at Spock, who was contemplating the ice floating in his untouched drink. *I bet you really wish you were somewhere else.*

"Bones, tell me that story again about the girls on Delta Four," Kirk said, grabbing McCoy's sleeve to gain his attention.

"Yeah, sex! I mean, really, what do we know about these Vulcans and their sex lives? I can't believe they only do 'it' once every seven years. I mean, if I did 'it' only once every seven years I'd...I'd.... Well, hell, I don't even want to think about it!"

Then don't!



"I mean, really, do Vulcans masturbate?" He turned intently toward Spock then back to Kirk. "I mean, really, do they?" McCoy asked insistently, turning once again to Spock, fully expecting an answer.

For the first time, Spock looked up from his drink. He looked at Kirk, his face totally impassive, then turned slowly to McCoy. His voice was low and deliberate, and even a very drunk McCoy could see he might have pushed too far.

"Doctor, you will refrain from prying into my personal life. You have had too much to drink and it is time we left." Spock stood, tossing a handful of credits on the table, then grabbed McCoy under one arm, jerking him up. Kirk grabbed the other arm and, together, they propelled a protesting McCoy from the establishment.

McCoy had passed out in their arms long before they reached the hotel. The desk clerk looked very amused as Spock dropped a leg to retrieve the room keys. They deposited their friend on his bed, propping him with pillows so he had to stay on his side.

You're going to feel like an air transport ran over you in the morning, Kirk grinned as he quietly shut the door.

"Spock, how about coming to my room for a while? Bones has gotten me so worked up I couldn't fall asleep for anything."

At first, Kirk thought his friend would refuse. Spock seemed strangely preoccupied, but after a moment, he nodded.

Opening the door, they were hit by the warmth of the room and Kirk remembered he'd asked the concierge to have a fire lit. He liked fireplaces. Some of his fondest memories were created in front of a roaring hearth.

"I'm going to have a little brandy; go ahead and have a seat." Kirk motioned to the two old-fashioned wingbacked chairs before the flames. He didn't notice Spock silently follow him to the small bar so was surprised when the brandy he had poured for himself was removed from his hand. Without a word, Spock took a chair, his back to the door. Kirk poured himself another drink and sat facing his friend, side to the fire.

The room was enjoyably silent, both men lost in their own thoughts. The fire crackled noisily, sparks flying as charred wood fell through the grate. The forcefield surrounding the fire held it at bay and allowed an uninhibited view of the brilliant reds, oranges and blues cast by the Rhomadin wood.

Suddenly, Kirk chuckled and smiled. He noticed the questioning look on Spock's face and grinned sheepishly. "Do Vulcans masturbate? Only McCoy would ask a question like that!" He shook his head and took a sip of his

brandy.

Spock took a gulp of his. "They do," he answered quietly.

"What?" Kirk's ears perked up, not sure if he had heard correctly. He stared at his friend in amazement as Spock finished his drink in one more gulp. "And they fantasize and have sexual dreams, too." Spock looked at his empty glass, then quickly got up to refill it from the bar. *Why did I say that?* He clutched the edge of the bar to steady himself, feeling a warm flush come over him. He returned to his chair with a full glass and propped his feet closer to the fire.

Spock drinking and in the mood to talk about sex? Kirk sipped his brandy. Its fire burned all the way down to his empty stomach. He wished he'd gotten McCoy to go out to dinner before going to that bar, but the doctor wouldn't be swayed. *Go on, admit it, you're curious and if Spock wants to talk....* "What do you fantasize about?" He watched the Vulcan carefully.

Spock's mouth twitched slightly. He stared at the brandy in his hand. The face looked...*melancholy. That's it. He's down about something and needs to talk.*

Spock took another large swallow. "About things I cannot have." He took another drink.

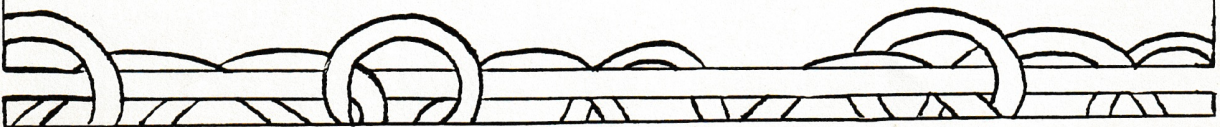
Kirk watched, a little worried. He'd never seen Spock drunk, or any Vulcan for that matter, and he wasn't sure he wanted to. He took a large sip and stared into the fire. When he looked back at his friend, Spock had finished his second drink and was looking at Kirk with veiled eyes. Kirk decided to venture on into more dangerous territory. He was never one to run from a challenge and this was going to prove to be one of his most interesting challenges yet.

"What is it you can't have? Any woman would be delighted to take you to bed."

Spock shook his head and looked at the empty glass in his hand. "It's not any woman that I want."

Whoa! Can't let that pass. This is getting interesting. I have to find out who this mystery woman is and since the brandy seems to be loosening up Spock's tongue.... Kirk's own glass was empty now and he stood, taking Spock's glass from his hand. Having refilled both, he wrapped Spock's fingers around the drink and resettled himself in his still-warm chair.

Spock nodded, studying the clear, blue liquid against the deep red glow of the fire.





"Does this person know how you feel?" Kirk asked carefully.

"I don't know for sure. There are so many differences between us. We're friends now and I'm afraid if I admit how I feel it would spoil the relationship. The loss would be...devastating. It would be too much of a price to pay."

He's got it bad! "Have you known this person long?" Kirk asked, trying to narrow down the field of women in Spock's life.

"Yes." He took another sip of his brandy and continued to study the fire.

Kirk's brows furrowed. His mind raced, quickly tossing out names and came down to only a handful. Kirk sipped several times, building his courage. He was determined to find out who had won Spock's heart.

"I'm sure the 'differences' aren't as much of a problem as you may think. You should confront this person and tell them. I can tell the indecision is putting you under a lot of...strain. Heck, you might be pleasantly surprised by their reaction. I mean, what's the very worst that could happen?"

"They would be offended and I would lose their friendship."

"And if they react that way, they're not worthy of your love anyway. Forget them. Move on and get on with your life!" Kirk leaned back and sipped on his drink, satisfied with the advice he'd given his friend. Now it was up to Spock to follow through -- or not -- as he chose.

Spock nodded and finished his third drink. He sighed deeply and turned to face Kirk. His eyes fixed on him. "You are right."

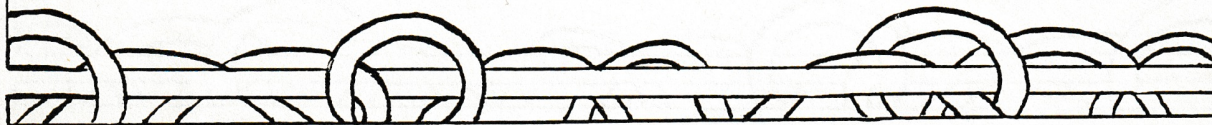
Kirk smiled, nodding with approval.

"Jim," Spock's voice was soft and gentle. "I'm in love with you. How do you feel about me?"

Kirk stopped in mid-swallow, almost choking on his drink. He was amazed, not even certain he'd heard right, but he knew he had. He finished his drink in one large gulp. Hurriedly getting up, he took the empty glass from Spock and turned to the bar. Leaning heavily against it, he tried to pour more brandy, but made a mess with his trembling hands. His mind whirled, a little drunk, a lot confused.

Me! He wants me? But Spock's a male, a Vulcan male at that. I had no idea he was.... His mouth went suddenly dry. He found a bar towel and mopped up the mess he'd made, delaying taking the drink back to Spock.

Maybe I shouldn't take it back to him. Maybe I should kick him out,



accuse him of being drunk and then we'd forget all about what was said and.... Then what? Go on just like before, long nights playing chess, quiet dinners together? But it wouldn't be the same. Spock would remember and so would I. There'd be a strain.

He turned with the glasses in his hands, but didn't move toward the chairs. He just stood there, looking at the Vulcan. *How do you feel, Jim Kirk? Answer that one, you coward!*

He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, silently. Spock's face was silhouetted in the firelight, making him look very alien and very desirable. He hadn't seriously considered Spock as a lover before. The Vulcan had always seemed so...inaccessible. And it wasn't as if he'd never been with a man before. He had been and had found it quite enjoyable. *The Galactic Bisexual.* McCoy had ribbed him more than once. But he couldn't believe all Spock wanted was a roll in the hay with his commanding officer. No, Spock said he 'loves' me and that implies commitment.

A cold shiver ran down his spine. He moved quietly to Spock, setting the glass carefully in his hand. Spock looked up. His eyes darted nervously, searching his friend's face for some kind of answer. Kirk sat down on the floor beside Spock's chair and looked up at him.

"Spock," he began softly, stroking the Vulcan's thigh. "I truly had no idea how you felt. But I'm not exactly sure what you want from me."

Spock started to speak, but Kirk stopped him, squeezing his thigh. "You are a fantasy I never thought I'd fulfill. You know I have been with other men before, that's not the problem. I feel you'd want more than just sex. I'm afraid you'd want some kind of commitment and I'm not sure I can give you that right now." He poured all the warmth and sincerity that he could into what he'd said.

Spock looked at him, then closed his eyes. Lifting his head, he moaned softly. Kirk could feel him tremble and looked down to see his own hand unconsciously caressing the growing bulge in Spock's pants. He started to pull his hand away, but a strong Vulcan hand gripped his wrist and pulled the hand back where it was.

"Spock!" Kirk whispered urgently. Slowly, the dark head lowered and the obsidian eyes fixed on Kirk, beholding the angelic, golden face below him.

"If sex is all I can have of you tonight, then I accept it." He leaned down, cupping the human's face in his hands and brushed his lips over his love's half-open ones. His hand slipped around into the golden hair, pulling those desirable lips closer to his. His tongue penetrated, thrusting between white teeth, twisting, teasing. He suddenly pulled back, breathless. Raising his head, he moaned, spreading his legs, allowing Kirk's exploring hand to

caress his aching groin.

Kirk suddenly stopped and stood, taking his new lover by the hand. He led him into the dark recesses of his bedroom. He sat Spock on his bed and pulled away from him. Turning on a small, dim light, he stepped back to study his friend.

By all the gods, you're beautiful! I want you so badly right now I could take you, ravage you. But this is going to be a night to remember for both of us. Sensually, he licked his lips. His hands, starting at his groin, slowly moved up his body, caressing it. Slowly, he unbuttoned his tunic, letting his fingers brush across his hardened nipples as he removed the silky garment. His breathing became slower, deeper as his fingers tugged at his waistband. Kicking off the soft, leather shoes, he slid the pants off in one fluid motion. He heard Spock gasp as his fully erect cock sprang out in the direction of the bed.

Spock started to get off the bed, but Kirk held up his hand, stopping him.

"No. Take off your clothes and stay there."

Never taking his eyes off Kirk, Spock stood. Quickly, he pulled his shirt over his head and then his boots and pants followed it to the floor.

Kirk held his breath a moment. *Hang on, Jim-Boy, if you want to pull this seduction off with any finesse. Finish what you've started.*

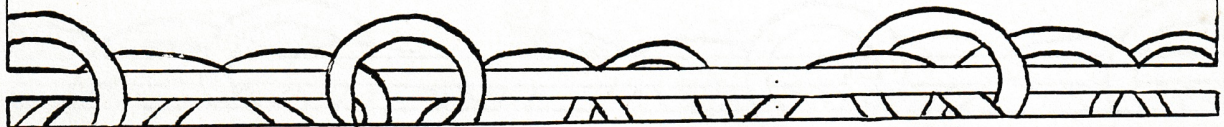
He motioned for Spock to sit on the bed again, which he did hesitantly.

Kirk turned his back to the Vulcan. He could feel those dark eyes drinking in every line and curve of his body.

Spreading his legs apart, he slid his hands along his muscled thighs, up to his hard, rounded ass, massaging it, letting one hand creep between the white cheeks. The hands continued their upward journey, under his arms, coursing their way to the front. Slowly, he turned, his tongue caressing his lips. His fingers gently pulling at his nipples, then moving down the flat stomach to his groin. His fingers brushed through the soft, curly hair to cup his balls, rolling them gently. A small drop of white dew formed on the head of his cock. Spock's eyes fixed on that droplet as Kirk moved closer, almost close enough to touch.

"Spock," Kirk whispered, "you are so beautiful. Would you do something for me?" Spock nodded. "Touch yourself," Kirk whispered hoarsely, "please."

Spock looked up at him, not sure of what his love wanted him to do. He watched, fascinated, as Kirk wrapped his own hand around his cock, slowly



massaging it and Spock followed, as if in a dream. Kirk trembled violently, watching Spock, his own arousal reaching a peak.

"Please, stop. Oh, ghod, Spock! I want you. Help me!"

"Yes," Spock replied so softly Kirk almost didn't hear him.

"Please, get on your knees, here." Kirk pointed to the floor in front of him. "Face me."

Spock did as he was told, his eyes wandering up to the beautiful face above him. "I love you, Jim. I have always been yours to command, ask what you will."

The soft lips curled into a slightly devilish smile. "Then, suck me. Take me in your mouth. Make me come, then you can do with me as you wish."

The Vulcan needed no further encouragement. He wrapped his hot lips around the human's engorged shaft. Moving back and forth, his tongue teasing the sensitive underside. He grabbed Kirk's tight ass and forced his groin forward, swallowing, taking all of him in. Kirk gasped. He clasped his hands around the Vulcan's head, intertwining his fingers into the silky, black hair. When Spock pulled Kirk's groin toward his face again, Kirk moaned loudly and thrust, pulling the Vulcan to him.

My ghod! Where did he learn to do this? I'm going to explode. I want to hold off, but.... "Spock!" Kirk rasped, thrusting again, deep into the hot, wet mouth, shooting bursts of fiery cream down the Vulcan's willing throat.

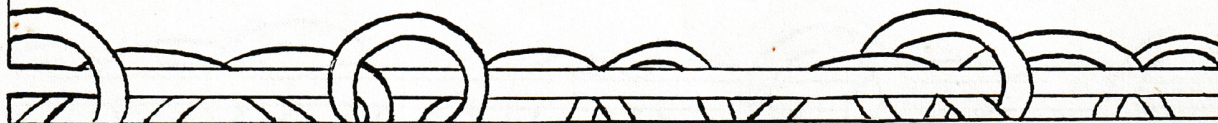
In one quick movement, the Vulcan planted his hands behind his lover's back and flipped him around onto the bed. He continued to suck until there was nothing left. Lifting his head, he crawled up to meet the soft, waiting lips, kissing his love deeply. Kirk could still taste himself on the Vulcan's tongue. Spock's lips moved down his chin, along the cool throat. He teased the human's nipples with his teeth, nipping gently, touching them lightly with his tongue. Kirk moaned and smiled.

"I'm in trouble now." He laughed as the hot tongue moved lower.

Spock raised his head and grinned ever so slightly. "Yes, you are." He continued his downward journey, cutting a moist trail down the wriggling body.

Kirk had almost forgotten his promise of compliance until he felt the Vulcan's strong hands slide under his buttocks. "I am yours to command," he gasped, as a hot tongue explored his navel.

"Then, move farther up on the bed and spread your legs," Spock urged,



eyes bright, voice gentle yet tense.

Kirk lay back, bending his knees and spreading his legs wide apart. Spock knelt on the soft mattress between those muscled thighs, lifting the human's legs up and practically bending him double. Kirk's flaccid penis flopped onto his belly.

"Spock?"

"Relax, enjoy...." He lowered his head to the upended ass and skillfully circled the anus with his tongue. Kirk's head flopped back and he moaned loudly.

Spock lubricated the tight opening thoroughly, then slowly inserted a finger, moving it gently in and out. He inserted a second finger and Kirk began to move against him.

"More, Spock! Oh, my love! More! Please....," the human begged, his head thrashing side to side as the probing fingers rubbed his swollen prostate.

Pulling pillows under Kirk's back, Spock lowered him down until the weight of Kirk's legs rested fully on his shoulders. Kirk could feel the hard shaft seeking admittance to his body. His cheeks were gently pried apart and the fiery shaft seemed to plunge into him. Both men screamed. Kirk gasped, almost unable to catch his breath, as the rock-hard penis partially impaled him; he knew more was to come. Kirk looked up and saw the absolute ecstasy on the Vulcan's face as he eased all the way in, then withdrew only to slam hard back into his lover.

Kirk could feel himself getting hard again as Spock thrust again and again. Faster, harder, the urgency in both building. The agony and the ecstasy of it blazing through their minds.

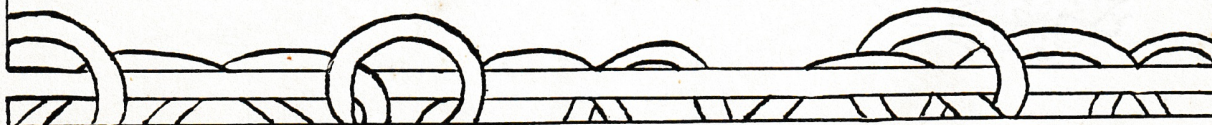
"Jim!" Spock moaned, his groin pounding the white cheeks. Liquid fire poured into Kirk, causing him to cry out.

The Vulcan fell over, spent, onto the cool human body. Both lay panting, Kirk running his fingers through the thick black hair. Slowly, Spock pulled away, rolling over to lie beside his fantasy.

Kirk reached out and intertwined his fingers in his Vulcan's hair, combing it, straightening it just a little.

My Vulcan. He liked the sound of that. *Maybe a commitment to Spock wouldn't be a bad idea.* He liked the sound of that, too.

He rolled onto his side and studied the peaceful face beside him.

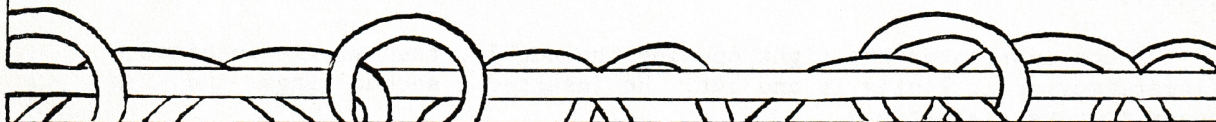


"Spock?" Kirk whispered so softly only Vulcan ears could hear him.

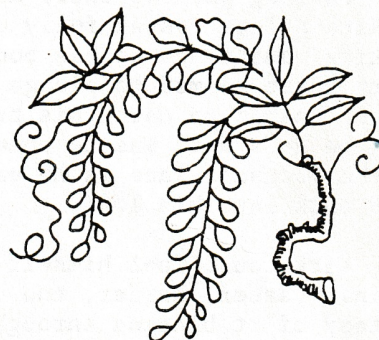
Spock's eyes opened slowly, lazily and turned his head toward his t'hy'la.

"You remember what I said about 'no commitments' earlier?" The Vulcan nodded his head weakly. "I think I'd like to talk about that in the morning. I'm beginning to have...uh...second thoughts on the subject." Kirk nuzzled down into the warm neck and threw a protective arm across his Vulcan.

And his Vulcan smiled warmly, returning the embrace.



AWAKENING



Skin tightens,
hairs standing up
in the cool electric air
but it isn't the wind
that fans and encourages
my arousal.

Beneath your dark
brown gaze
it isn't the wind.

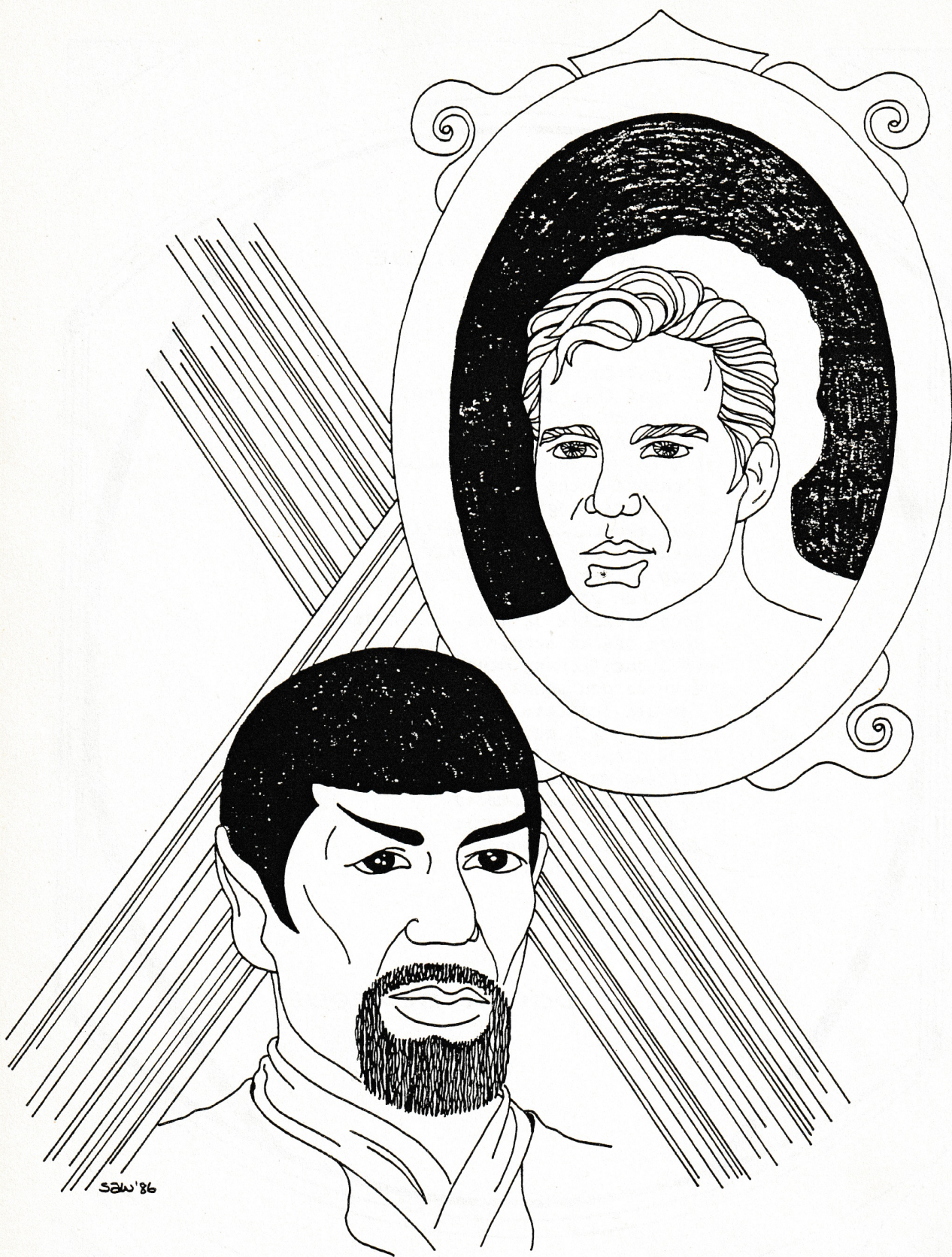


Natasha Solten

BURNING BLUE

At last dawn has broken,
at last this night is done,
buried in your place.
Air clings to me;
I rise; weighed with shadows.
I cannot think
as events progress;
eyes rooted to your ghostly form.
Miracles are not my forté,
they shiver the air I taste.
And then you turn,
face a puzzle of hues and shades
never before seen,
eyes questioning mine
even as you speak.
The air shatters
as you watch me,
eyes deeply cutting,
setting my heart aflame.
My soul surges forward,
finding home in yours,
tasting the remnants
of your journey,
forever
burning blue.

DOUYA BLACQUE



SHADOW LAND

I live in a world now bereft of his presence
and made aware that
my Captain is not that Captain.
Giving me a hint,
a glimpse of another possibility,
told that my universe
could be,
might be,
possibly be the same as his
is whetting the appetite of a starving man
for how can I watch him
now without dreams intruding whenever he speaks.
I imagine other words
issuing from those lips
and see his hands being
gentle instead of cruel.
I am followed by that golden shade
from beyond the mirror
that casts a shadow on my soul.

PAM SMITH

HERE AND GONE

Beneath these lights
you chase me down:
beneath the amber moons of G'thra or
the sun of Eridani,
the bath of stars we call our home.
In autumn winds
and shades of winter,
summer dust storms,
spring's frost on Andor...
relentless and burning
and delicate in tone and touch,
a comfort,
a challenge,
a journey to here and gone
and back...
a journey inevitably at end.



FARIS VINCENT



THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS

Jenny Starr



Spock lay back on the narrow bed and made a conscious effort to control breathing and pulse rate, his brain duly processing the messages and relaying them, lightning quick, to the proper systems.

Fascinating, what this time always did to Vulcan metabolic functions.

As heartbeat slowed and respiration became more regular, he considered the phenomenon. Obviously, as physical exertion became more intense, the demands placed upon the cardiovascular system would increase to a point at which said system would be required to pump at an accelerated rate in order to accommodate the aforementioned physical exertion. Even more intriguing, however, was the hyper-activity of the endocrine glands near the anterior medial border of the kidney, consisting of a mesodermal cortex that produced steroids which....

"Spock?"

...included sex hormones and hormones concerned with metabolic functions and an ectodermal medulla that produced....

"Spock!"

Spock abandoned his analysis and turned his attention to the human lying beside him. "Yes, Jim?"

Hands clasped behind his head, Kirk lay watching him with an amused glint in his eyes, lips curved in just the suggestion of a smile. "Where the hell were you? You had that glazed look in your eyes like you were a thousand lightyears away."

Twin ebony brows rose as the eyes below them surveyed the muscular, golden body sprawled enticingly half in, half out of the bedcovers. Spock's own lips twitched in its own threat of a smile at the sight of Kirk's chest rising and falling rapidly in a familiar pattern of metabolic overload.

"Spock?"

Direct and to the point as always, Spock answered his bedmate's question. "I was analyzing post-coital metabolic functioning, Jim."

Kirk chuckled mischievously and snaked a hand under the blanket. "I'll give you some metabolic functions to analyze, Science Officer."

The Vulcan squirmed as the hand homed in on its target. "Jim, I am still quite sensitive from...."

The sound of the room's intercom cut off the half-hearted protest in mid-sentence.

"Damn!" Kirk was all business now, jerking his hand back and rising quickly to stride over to the annoying communications device.

Spock relaxed again and lay back to admire the rear view.

"Kirk here," the voice belonging to the rear view intoned.

Spock's eyes drifted shut as he listened to the always fascinating shift from sensuous lover to commanding officer. He always found the abrupt metamorphosis highly erotic for some reason, and one eyebrow rose in curiosity as he considered initiating an analysis as to why that was so.

At the moment, however, it seemed entirely too much trouble, and he

yawned lazily and tuned back in to Kirk's conversation.

The comm officer's baritone voice was booming out of the intercom. Uhura's third shift replacement, Spock recognized. "Captain, Mr. Scott wanted me to remind you of your meeting with him in Engineering at 0630 hours."

"Acknowledged, Mr. Rodriguez. Tell Mr. Scott I'll be there. Kirk out."

Kirk stretched, glanced at the chronometer, and patted his stomach, as though consoling it for the breakfast it would miss because of the early-morning meeting. "I wish just once Scotty could schedule one of his mini-crisis sessions for a decent hour." He continued muttering darkly to himself as he strode toward the head.

Spock snuggled down deeper under the covers. "If you will recall, you informed me that this is a 'decent' hour when you awakened me thirty minutes ago with certain...lustful thoughts on your mind, Captain," he called to the disappearing back.

His only answer was a chuckle, followed by the sound of the sonic shower.

The Vulcan smiled, content, and did not even consider for once the need for an analysis of that contentment. He looked at the chronometer, wondering if perhaps there were time to continue an exploration of his lover's 'lustful thoughts'. Fascinating how, since his relationship with Jim had recently taken a turn for the physical, he could not seem to get enough of a certain illogical activity.

Now. If one allowed nineteen point eight minutes for the act, another ten point nine for a shower and dressing....

"There you go, glazing over again." A towel-clad Kirk was heading toward his closet of clean uniforms, aiming an affectionate smile over his shoulder as he pulled out a pair of black pants. "What are you analyzing now?"

Spock cringed inwardly. Admitting to himself that he desired further sexual activity was one thing. Admitting it to Jim was quite another. Their physical relationship was still too new for him to have overcome his inherent reticence about such matters. He wondered if he ever would.

His thoughts must have shown on his face, for Kirk quickly pulled his gold tunic over his head and came to sit on the edge of the bed. He smiled and tenderly brushed Spock's cheek with the back of one hand.

"We'll go to bed early tonight, okay?" he said softly, tracing the shape of Vulcan lips with a finger. "I wish I could stay now, but I've got a full day ahead of me."

Vaguely embarrassed at having his mind read so accurately yet again by this highly intuitive human, Spock squirmed and pulled the blanket higher on his chest. "Unnecessary, Jim. I...."

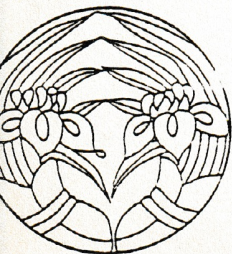
Kirk shook his head and pressed his finger lightly against the warm lips. "Shh. You don't need to hide your desire from me, Spock. In fact, I wish you wouldn't."

Dropping his hand to Spock's partially covered chest, Kirk gazed at him with a curious mixture of thoughtfulness and wistful longing on his face. "I just wish...."

He lapsed into silence, shook his head, and smiled. Starting to rise from the bed, he said, "I've got to go."

Without thinking, Spock grabbed the gold-clad forearm, his fingers wrapping tightly around the stiff rows of braid as Kirk sat back down on the bed. "What do you wish, Jim? Please tell me."

Kirk stared at him for a moment, seeming to debate the subject in his own mind before speaking, while Spock held his breath and waited. There



was something about their relationship that was bothering Jim, he knew. Something that always brought that fleeting look of frustrated longing to the handsome features whenever a session of lovemaking had ended. What was it? What was Spock doing wrong? He knew he was relatively inexperienced, but Jim seemed to enjoy teaching him about love. So what was missing in their moments of intimacy with one another?

Kirk chewed on his bottom lip, still watching Spock's face. "Spock, don't you ever have the desire to take the lead in our lovemaking?"

Spock was confused. "The lead?"

Shrugging, Kirk studied the edge of the sheet, fingering it abstractedly where it brushed the silky hairs on Spock's chest. "Yeah, you know. Initiate things yourself. Be...dominant once in awhile."

Spock stared at him in surprise. "But Jim...I was under the impression that you enjoyed...." Feeling the heat flood his cheeks, he tried again. "The need for dominance is an instinctive trait in you...." His voice trailed off again as he slid uncomfortably further down in the bed and averted his face on the pillow. "If I do not satisfy you...."

Kirk hooked one finger under his lover's chin and turned the head to face him again. Putting both hands on the narrow shoulders, he gently shook the lean body. "No, no...that's not what I meant." His hands squeezed the shoulders tighter. "Jesus, Spock, I've never experienced such satisfaction in my life. With anybody."

Spock was once more fighting the annoying blush. "Then...?"

"I just...." Kirk worried his lower lip again. "Well, when you go into pon farr next time...you'll need to dominate, won't you?"

The blush was winning. Spock cleared his throat and turned his head to stare at the wall. "That is more than five years in the future."

"But you will need to...take the lead then, won't you?"

"Yes!" Spock said more forcefully than he'd intended. He wanted this discussion over.

Kirk's hands dropped and he concentrated on smoothing nonexistent wrinkles from the blanket across Spock's chest. "Well, I just don't want things to be uncomfortable between us when that time comes. I mean...I'll want to know you're relaxed about sex. Not feeling stressed about having to take on a new role with me...."

Spock breathed a small, mental sigh of relief. So that was all that was worrying Jim. As usual, he was more concerned about Vulcan needs than his own.

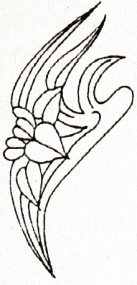
His eyes smiling, Spock clasped the hand on his chest and said softly, "Jim, do not concern yourself. When the time comes, I shall...take the lead'...quite forcefully, I fear."

He watched with concern for Kirk's reaction. Their newfound intimacy was so young they had never actually discussed their future yet. He had not even been sure James Kirk would still be there for him when the pon farr came again. He felt a hot chill of delight course its way through his stomach at the idea that this man was taking for granted that what they had so recently nourished between them would be permanent. Perhaps, before long, he could dare to bring up the subject of a bond....

His breath caught then as he watched a smile dawn on Kirk's face that would defeat any world's sun in a contest for brightness. Leaning forward, Kirk dropped an affectionate kiss on Spock's lips, then pulled back and winked. "I'll be looking forward to it, lover."

He pulled the covers higher on Spock's chest and stood. "And now I've really got to go, or I'll have Scotty up here dragging me out by the ears." He laughed as Spock's brow rose at the thought of such an unlikely scenario.





Kirk strode briskly to the room divider. Reaching it, however, he stopped and turned. Leaning against the divider with one shoulder, he surveyed the Vulcan lying in the cozy cocoon of the bed and smiled. "Why don't you stay there and get some more sleep? You're off today and I've already programmed your calls for auto reroute." He tilted his head, as though framing his lover in a mental painting. "I like the idea of you sleeping in my bed while I'm gone."

Spock raised a brow haughtily, then spoiled the effect with a wide yawn.

Grinning, Kirk pushed himself away from the divider and headed through the other room to the door. "Maybe having that picture in my mind will keep me awake during all these damned meetings I've got today," he threw over his shoulder. The door whooshed twice and he was gone.

In the silence of the room, Spock stretched out luxuriously under the covers and gazed at the room around him. It wasn't the first time he'd slept in James Kirk's bed. In fact, they'd spent every night here since they'd started their love affair just two weeks ago. But it was the first time he'd ever been in Jim's bed when Jim wasn't there. He felt another illogical thrill in his stomach at the feeling it gave him. He felt he truly belonged in this bed, in this room. To Jim. He sighed contentedly.

Sinking deeper into the warmth, he smiled. Jim was sleeping with twice as many blankets these nights as he normally did. All for a Vulcan's comfort. Stretching his arms lazily back over his pillowed head, his hands encountered the small wooden sea chest on the shelf behind the bed. A token from Jim's father when he was but a small boy with stars in his eyes and dreams of long sea voyages in his head. Inching one hand over to the left, Spock next felt the wood and canvas model of an ancient sailing ship. A gift from Spock himself, on the occasion of Jim's last birthday.

Reminded, Spock sighed and clasped his hands behind his head, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. Jim's birthday. Always a difficult time for Spock in the past. A Vulcan born and bred, he had a history behind him of never receiving gifts, having been taught in fact that purchasing gifts for another was illogical when the recipient was so much better qualified to select the item in question for himself.

But Jim was a human. A human with an unstated but obvious love of presents. So Spock had broken a lifelong tradition and given Jim the ship a year ago. The year before that, the Rigellian crystal ball that changed color and pattern of design with the room's temperature. Gifts Jim had appreciated and seemed to enjoy.

Tomorrow was Jim's birthday again. It was time to purchase another gift.

But this year was different, Spock reflected as he curled his toes into the warmth of the bed. Both the ship and the crystal ball were appropriate, thoughtful gifts, but they had been from one friend to another. This year, the gift would be from lover to lover. Special. Something for Jim alone.

He sighed. So today, while they were in orbit around space station K-5, he intended to exercise his little-used shore leave privilege and beam down to look through the many shops for....

For what? That was the question which had been haunting Spock's waking hours for the past five point two days. What did one buy for a lover? What would be special enough when one's lover was the very special Captain James Tiberius Kirk?

Spock shivered at the prospect. On the one hand, he was most un-Vulcanly excited at the idea of shopping for Jim. His lover. Spock's lover. He still found the situation nearly impossible to believe. The idea that such a man was content, happy even, to be his.

On the other hand, he was fearful (also most un-Vulcan) that he would fail to please Jim with his choice of gift. These shopping expeditions had been difficult enough the past two years. But somehow, the success of



the present had not been so crucial then. He had wanted to give Jim something special, yes. But this year...this year, the gift must be something Jim would remember for the rest of his life. Even if broken or lost, it must occupy an honored place in Jim's memories. A gift of love.

Spock concentrated on the ceiling. What would Jim desire more than anything else from him? What, what, what?

Sighing, he finally peeled back the warmth and rose from the bed. The gift, whatever it was to be, would not materialize from thin air. If it was to be found, he must take steps to find it.

Walking through Jim's bathroom into his own, he stopped as he caught a glimpse of himself in the large wall mirror. Naked. A naked Vulcan officer coming from his Captain's bed after a night of heated passion. He stared hard at his image, shaking his head slightly in wonder. Before this new relationship with Jim had begun, he had never slept naked a night in his life. Had never had the courage to stare at his own bare reflection.

He continued to stare. What did Jim see when he looked at him? His face was...not unpleasant. But not beautiful like Jim's. His shoulders were lean, slightly slumped. Certainly not proud and straight like Jim's. His arms? Few hints of the leashed muscular power they held were evident. Jim's arms were well muscled, looked as powerful as they were.

He frowned at his mirrored chest. He had always thought the scattering of black hair an untidy imperfection. But Jim had laid his head there and whispered his admiration, his envy...had run semen-wet fingers through that hair, kissed the coppered nipples nesting there and sighed his pleasure. Now the hair was one of Spock's most prized possessions.

Spock stared downward. His hips were slender, too slender. McCoy had once told him he was so thin that when he turned sideways he disappeared. Was forever ordering him to 'put some meat on those bones'. But Jim loved to run his hands across the valley of his lover's stomach, across the hills of the hipbones, down into the foliage of....

Spock leaned forward and stared harder. His penis was well formed, slightly longer and narrower than Jim's. Jim's was thick and well-rounded, virile looking even at rest. But Jim had circled narrow organ and wide organ together with his hands and pronounced them perfect. Made for each other, he had said.

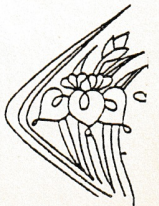
Jim had praised his beauty. His beauty. Spock of Vulcan's beauty. Spock shook his head again in wonder, then gave one last awed glance to the mirror image that had captured and held a starship captain's love, straightened his shoulders with pride and went into his bedroom to dress.

* *

The space station was, as always, crowded and busy, being in one of the most heavily traveled sectors of the quadrant. Spock saw many of the Enterprise crew wandering in noisy groups from shop to shop, bar to bar, trying to pack as much productive excitement into a few hours of leave time as was humanly possible.

Somewhere in the administrative area of the base, Spock knew, James Kirk and Leonard McCoy were meeting with designers and technicians from the Fleet HQ Medical and Engineering divisions. Immediately after the Captain's early-morning 'crisis session' with Mr. Scott, he had been scheduled to sit down with them to discuss refitting and installation of new, updated equipment for McCoy's sickbay. Kirk had expected the meetings to last all day, so Spock calculated the odds of accidentally encountering his lover while shopping for the birthday gift to be acceptably low. Therefore, he took his time and made a day of it.

As he strolled along the busy corridors and surveyed the goods from across the galaxy in the windows of the shops, Spock reflected how this was the first time he had ever felt relaxed and comfortable on one of these shopping expeditions. Indeed, the only reason he had ever had to go shopping before was for the purpose of Jim's birthday presents in the



past years. On those occasions, he had felt out of place and uncomfortable with the happy throngs around him and the noisy, crowded shops. Being somewhat of a loner, Spock tended to feel rather claustrophobic in crowds.

This excursion, however, was quite different. Somehow, he felt more...secure. More as though he belonged in some indefinable way.

He stood gazing into a window filled with delicate crystal sculptures and analyzed the new feeling. Although he and Jim were not bonded--indeed their relationship was too new for them even to have discussed such a major step--he could feel a sense of unity with Jim, a completeness, even when apart. He seemed to carry his lover with him, warmly secure in a part of his mind.

They had never linked minds during the sexual act. The possibility of a bond forming was too likely, Spock knew, when the mind was made vulnerable by such high levels of passion. But somehow, he seemed to feel a link with his lover anyway.

He shook his head at the illogic of it and clasped his hands behind his back, staring hard at a crystal sculpture of a Berengarian dragon while his brain dissected and categorized these new impressions. Perhaps this was normal for love. 'This simple feeling', Jim had called it once, while attempting to soothe Spock's uneasiness at finding himself so vulnerable and open with his new lover. Such openness was totally alien to the Vulcan who had spent a lifetime trying to keep imprisoned those emotions that begged for freedom when Jim was close.

If this feeling of warmth and security was normal for human love, what would a bond be like with someone whom you truly loved? Spock found himself experiencing an uncharacteristic glow of excitement at the thought. He wondered how long a wait was appropriate before broaching to a human the subject of a lifelong commitment....

He was so engrossed in his mental world that he didn't see or hear someone coming out of the shop he was staring into until his name was spoken.

"Mr. Spock. Are you planning to buy the dragon?"

Spock started slightly and turned to see Uhura, Sulu, and Chekov behind him. Uhura was holding a fairly large, gaily decorated box.

"Lieutenants Uhura and Sulu, Ensign Chekov," Spock acknowledged politely. "In point of fact, I was merely appreciating the fine workmanship."

"It is a pretty thing, isn't it?" Sulu said, staring admiringly into the shop window. "Didn't I hear you say once that you'd been to Berengaria?"

Spock nodded. "Actually, the sculpture bears little resemblance to the creature itself. This rendering is rather...fantasized. The Berengarian dragons themselves look considerably more ferocious."

Uhura laughed, tilting her head as she surveyed the sculpture. "It is kind of 'cutesy', isn't it? Oh, well. I guess we'd all rather have a benign looking dragon sitting on our shelf than something that looks like it'll eat us up the first time we turn out the lights."

Chekov joined in. "Thees one looks as eef eet vill cuddle you to death ven you turn out the lights!"

Sulu and Uhura laughed in appreciation and Spock raised an amused brow.

Glancing at Uhura's box curiously, he asked, "Did you purchase a sculpture, Lieutenant?"

Looking down at the forgotten package in her hands, Uhura smiled, an excited glow lighting up her brown eyes. "Oh, yes, Mr. Spock. And wait 'til you see it!"



"Indeed?"

"It's a birthday present for the Captain. We planned to ask if you wanted to go in on it with us. It's a joint gift from the first shift bridge crew."

Spock's interest was ^{ign} peaked. "I would be honored to contribute, Lieutenant. May I know what it is?"

Uhura looked around the bustling corridor and nodded toward an unoccupied bench a short distance away. "Let's go over there so we can open it. It's pretty fragile, and I sure don't want to break it before he even sees it."

The group headed for the bench, which was screened from the crowds by a cluster of large green plants, thriving and growing happily under a bank of artificial lights hidden in the ceiling.

The three junior officers settled gratefully on the bench, glad for a rest from the tiring walk through the shops. Spock stood looking on, hands clasped behind his back, eyes carefully guarding his look of intense curiosity at this gift intended for his lover.

Uhura took the lid off the box and very carefully lifted out a delicate crystal sculpture of a Constitution-class starship. It was authentically and beautifully crafted, sparkling in the light when Uhura turned it around on its crystal base.

Spock gazed at it in admiration, surprised and grateful for these officers of Jim's who had had such sensitivity and knowledge of their Captain that they had purchased the one item which would delight him most. Mentally, he made room for the lovely sculpture on the shelf behind Jim's bed.

"It is exquisite, Lieutenant," he congratulated the beaming communications officer. "Your taste is to be commended. Captain Kirk will be most pleased."

She smiled. "Do you think so? I know how he feels about the Enterprise, so I figured we couldn't go wrong with this. Mr. Scott's making a little plaque to put on the base here." She pointed to the delicate pedestal.



"It was the only one they had, too," Sulu chimed in. "One of a kind. So we don't have to worry about him coming in here and buying one for himself."

Spock controlled a twitch at the corner of his lips as he tried to imagine his busy Captain taking time away from the sessions concerning refitting of his beloved ship to go windowshopping. "I do not believe that is likely in any case, Mr. Sulu. However, if this sculpture is a singular issue, it must have been rather costly."

Uhura grinned sheepishly. "Well, let's put it this way, Mr. Spock. Plan to dig deep if you're going to contribute toward it."

She laughed as Spock's brow shot up. "Well, he's Captain James T. Kirk, isn't he? Isn't he worth something special?"

"Indeed he is, Lieutenant," agreed Spock, wondering to himself what these officers would think if they only knew just how special he considered Captain James T. Kirk.

Sulu rose from the bench and stretched. "Well, we'd better hit the trail. We're supposed to meet some people at The Starside for a drink in a few minutes." He looked uncertainly at his superior officer. "Uh...would you like to join us, Mr. Spock?"

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. However, I have other matters which require my attention."

The three officers waved a farewell and headed off to their rendezvous, noisily congratulating each other on their perfect choice of a



gift.

Spock watched after them until they disappeared from sight, feeling an unaccustomed warmth toward these people who thought so highly of their Captain. He wondered if another commanding officer anywhere in the Fleet generated such respect and genuine affection from his crew as did James Kirk.

Turning then, he headed down the corridor in the other direction to resume his quest. He was pleased to be included in the bridge crew's gift for his Captain. But he still needed to find one for his lover.

* *

After three point twelve hours, a frustrated Vulcan was still walking the corridors of space station K-5, seeking the perfect gift. He had inspected, considered, and discarded treasures from dozens of worlds: books from Earth, clothing from Altair, paintings from the art colonies on Zindar, geodes from the mines of Galina, shape-changing crystals from Vega, confections from the famed bakeries of Mengen, jewelry from the artisans of Temir, silken tapestries from Kasimar.... Nothing seemed right. None of it was something Jim couldn't go out and find for himself if he really wanted to do so.

Spock was stumped. What did one buy for a lover? Lover and, hopefully, future bondmate?

He found himself standing in front of a large, quiet bar with a tasteful sign over its door in the shape of a starship. The name 'The Ship's Log' was on it. Recognizing the name as one Jim had once mentioned as his favorite place to have a drink and 'unwind', Spock made the decision to go in, give his feet an unneeded rest, and rethink his gift ideas.

The bar was relaxingly dark, with music coming subliminally from hidden speakers. Softly-lit holopaintings of deep-space ships of Federation fame graced the walls, the Enterprise among them. Waiters and waitresses wore alarmingly brief costumes in the gold, red, and blue colors of Star Fleet uniforms. Spock was beginning to understand why Jim thought so highly of the place.

The booths in the dark room were secluded from each other by high divider panels, thereby assuring individual privacy. Each table was dimly lit by a small lighting cube, giving a cozy cocoon of warmth to the table in the dark void of the bar.

Spock selected a table that was in view of the holopainting of the Enterprise on the wall and sat down. Leaning back in the comfortable form-fitting booth, he placed his order for tal'meen juice. Only after the waitress had taken his order and left did he hear familiar voices drifting faintly over the divider panel from the booth next to his. Jim and Dr. McCoy.

He started to get up and join them, as they obviously had not seen him come in. However, as the nature of their conversation registered on his ears, he sank back into the seat and unashamedly eavesdropped.

"I don't know, Jim," McCoy was saying, "I think I'm gonna prescribe sick leave for you instead of shore leave."

"Come again?" Kirk's voice said.

"Well, I mean this has got to be the first time since your first year of command...Lord, remember how serious you were in those days?..that you've turned down a chance to go spend an evening in a station's local cathouse."

Spock accepted his juice from the waitress, paid her, and leaned forward, listening intently.

"Well," came the familiar soft voice, "I guess there's a first time for everything."



"Yeah, but come on, Jim. How long's it been since you had yourself a lay, hmm? You know how keyed up you get when you go without too long."

Kirk laughed. "Do I seem keyed up to you, Doctor?"

"No, and that's what gets me. Usually by the time we get to port, you're climbing the bulkheads for a little action. I know I am!"

"Bones, you know there's an age-old remedy for that."

"I presume you're talkin' about that nasty little habit that makes you go blind and grow hair on your palms?"

Kirk chuckled and ordered another Troyian whiskey. "The very one."

"Go easy on that stuff, Jim. You know it gives you headaches."

"Aye, aye, Doctor sir."

"Well, I've only got one problem with masturbation."

"And that is?"

"I'm not my type."

Kirk exploded in appreciative laughter while Spock, on his side of the divider, raised a brow.

"Bones," Kirk said, still laughing, "nobody said you have to look at yourself in a mirror while you're doing it."

"Still loses a lot in the translation. Give me a redhead with curves any time."

"Then I hereby bequeath all the curvaceous redheads on K-5 to you."

"Yeah, but," McCoy mock-whined, "they always come flocking over when you're with me. I've made a career out of latchin' on to your leftovers."

"Well, look at it this way. Without me along as competition you'll get all of them."

"Hey, now, there's a thought."

Spock sipped from his glass and tried to keep his mind from conjuring up images of Jim Kirk on the prow in a...what was it? Cathouse?

"Okay, Jim," McCoy was saying. "All jokes aside, what gives?"

"Hmmm?"

"Don't use that innocent look with me. I said, what gives? I've seen you in all your moods, and I have a feeling I recognize this one."

"And which 'mood' do you think you see?"

"The big one. You're in love, my friend. Again."

Spock nearly dropped his glass. The only sound he heard over the divider was silence.

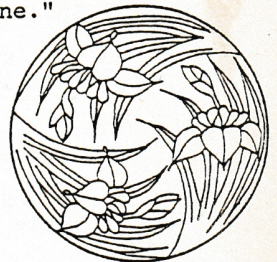
McCoy finally broke it. "Jim? Did you hear me?"

"I heard you."

"So? Since when don't you confide in your best drinkin' buddy? I thought we kept each other up on these things."

Even without benefit of seeing McCoy's face, Spock could recognize the hurt expression by voice alone. Kirk and McCoy had always confided very closely in one another, he knew.

"Sorry, Bones. You're right. I am in love. But not 'again'," Kirk



said quietly.

"Uh oh. This sounds serious."

"It is."

Spock heard the sound of a sigh, then McCoy spoke. "Okay, shall we play Twenty Questions? Is it somebody on the ship? Well, obviously it is. We haven't been anywhere else for the past three months."

Another silence, then Kirk replied, "It's Spock."

This time, it was McCoy who had trouble hanging onto his glass. Spock heard a small crash, a muttered curse, then, "What?!"

Kirk's voice was calm. "It's Spock I'm in love with. But I'd hardly call it a 'mood'."

"Jesus! Uh...say, sweetheart," McCoy was obviously paging the waitress, "could you get me some napkins here? I kinda made a mess."

Silence reigned while the woman brought napkins, cleaned up the table, and left. Then McCoy spoke again. "Did you say Spock?"

"You heard me. You wouldn't have spilled ten credits worth of overpriced booze if I'd said I was in love with the cocktail waitress."

"True. But...Spock?"

"Spock."

"Well, I'll be damned."

"Probably."

"Sure you're not puttin' me on?"

"Positive."

"Well, I guess I don't have to ask if it's serious...."

"You don't."

"...since you wouldn't change a lifetime of sexual behavior if it wasn't."

"Right."

"I'm assuming this does include...physical love?"

"Yes."

"Jesus."

"What's so hard to believe, Bones? You've always known I love Spock."

"Loving somebody and being in love with somebody are two entirely different kettles of fish, my friend. I mean, I love you, but that sure doesn't mean I go around...."

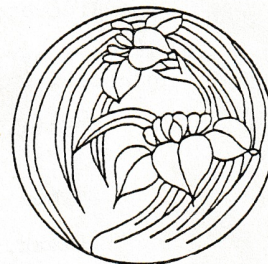
"In this case, I guess they are the same thing. It's just that we've finally gotten around to expressing it."

"How long have you two been...?"

"Two weeks."

"Oh, shit. Young love yet. No wonder you're walkin' around with more stars in your eyes than usual."

"Is it really that obvious?"





"Only to somebody who's as nosy as I am. Fortunately, there aren't too many of us around where the Captain of the ship's concerned."

"Bones...I'm sorry I didn't tell you."

"Hey, no problem. None of my business."

"Of course it's your business. You're our friend. Stop sounding like a martyr taking his last breath."

At the next table, Spock was holding his own breath. Both he and Jim had deemed it advisable to keep their relationship a secret from the crew and to delay telling McCoy for awhile. But they had never intended to hurt their mutual friend by doing so.

Spock heard Jim's soft voice again. "It's just that...well, this is something very special for both of us. I guess we just wanted to keep it our own private secret for a little while...."

"Say no more, Jim. I understand. Really. I know how it is. Or at least, I remember how it was."

"Oh, right. God knows you're as old as Methuselah."

"Well, when I see somebody walking around looking like a little boy who just got his first bicycle, I feel as old as Methuselah."

"Is that how I look?"

"Sorta."

Kirk chuckled. "Sorry."

Spock heard an encore chuckle from McCoy. "Don't be. I know when you fall head over heels you're convinced at first you have to make love four times a day or your dick'll fall off. I guess that demands a little privacy."

Kirk laughed and Spock blushed a full-scale green alert on his side of the divider. That was just about how many times a day they had been making love....

"Well," McCoy was continuing, "I guess the only problem I have with it is trying to imagine it."

"Say what?"

"I mean...well, I've seen you in action, Jim-boy. I've seen you on leave a time or two making love to three women at a time. And satisfying every one of them. But somehow, I just can't quite picture you being made love to. At least, I assume you take turns playing Tarzan and Jane?"

There was silence for a moment, then Kirk said quietly, "Well, that's...kind of a problem, Bones."

Spock held his breath.

McCoy said, "You mean you're having a hard time playing the submissive role?"

"No. I mean I want very badly to play the submissive role. I just haven't been given the opportunity."

Both Spock and McCoy were silent at that one. Spock sat back confused, and McCoy's voice finally said, "You're kidding."

Spock wondered the same thing.

Kirk's voice said, "No, I'm not. Bones, haven't you ever had the fantasy of somebody taking total control over you, sexually? With you just sort of lying there...helpless?"

"You're talking about the rape fantasy."

"No, not exactly. Well, sort of, I guess. But not with the violence and the nasty strangers and that whole scenario. Just somebody you desire...completely dominating you."

"The fantasy's not an unusual one. But I can't believe I'm hearing it from you. No, strike that. I can believe it."

"You can? You mean I shouldn't be worried about it?" Kirk laughed nervously.

"No, not at all. You see, Jim, you're the leader type. With a capital L. I've probably never met such a strong personality as you are. It's what makes you one dynamite starship captain. But all that strength and leadership have to pay a price somewhere in the psyche. With you, it's a need to be sexually dominated. Not too surprising, when I think about it. Considering the kind of life you lead."

"Glad to hear you think I'm normal."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far."

McCoy and Kirk shared an affectionate laugh, while Spock continued to sit stunned behind his wall.

"Actually," Kirk was continuing, "I don't want to be dominated in bed ~~all~~ the time ~~in bed~~. I love making love to Spock, Bones. You'll never know what a turn-on it is to make it with somebody who you know is strong enough to reach up and break your neck at a whim if he chose to do it. But there he is, twice my strength, responding to my every touch and letting me take him like he's totally powerless to resist me...." Kirk's chuckle sounded a trifle sheepish. "I guess that sounds like a power trip to end all power trips, huh?"

"Probably. But if we're honest about it, that's a big part of what turns most men on...feeling like we've got our partner at our mercy and could do anything we wanted to with her. Or him. It's the caveman in us."

"I guess. But sometimes...sometimes, Bones, I really crave for him to just be aggressive as hell with me. Throw me down on the bed and take me like.... Am I thoroughly disgusting you?"

"Hell, no. I enjoy being a voyeur as much as the next guy. But Jim, if this is something you really want, why don't you just tell Spock?"

Spock heard a sigh. "I tried to, this morning. I just embarrassed him. And made him feel like he's not satisfying me. I don't want to risk that again, Bones. It's taken me too long to get him to the point where he'll admit to even having desires. Even if he only admits it to himself, and not to me."

"Well, I for one am surprised as hell you even got him to that point! This is a Vulcan with some pretty heavy hangups we're talking about here, Jim. Go easy with him. Let him settle into this new relationship before you go changing the rules on him. Lord, it's only been...what'd you say? Two weeks?"

"Yeah."

On the other side, Spock took advantage of the temporary silence to catch his breath. Why hadn't he been able to ascertain Jim's desires? What kind of lover was he that he hadn't been able to 'read' the person who meant most in the universe to him? Obviously, with a link or a bond, the problem would not exist. But even without it, he should have been more sensitive.

Jim was talking again and Spock tuned back in.

"There's another side to the problem, too."

"Oh?"

"Well, with this...fantasy...of mine, I find myself really looking





forward to his next pon farr." Another self-conscious chuckle.

"Jesus, talk about a death wish."

"No, Bones. It'll be different. This time I'll be there for him, ready and willing. But I worry about how he'll take to playing a totally different role with me...if he's been the submissive one all along, then suddenly he has to be dominant."

"Well, that's a long way off yet. You know, of course, the ideal situation for you two would be a totally equal relationship of give and take."

"That's what I want more than anything, Bones. But he's got to learn to take first, as well as give, for that to happen."

"Jim, like I said. It's only been two weeks. Give him time. He's come a long way if you ask me. After all, he's captivated and caught the Great Stud of the Milky Way. I could name a few hundred females and males who'd give a boatload of credits to be able to say the same thing."

Kirk chuckled. "Well, the Great Stud just retired. So they're all yours, pardner."

"Don't I wish."

"Listen Bones, I appreciate the drinks and the willing ear. But I have to get back. I've got to coordinate tomorrow's installation plans for your new equipment with Scotty."

"Wait up. I'll come with you. I wanna be there when Scotty hears how he's gonna have to tear out two of his precious bulkheads to get this stuff in. Suppose they'll hear him screamin' all the way to the Barrier?"

Laughing, Kirk rose to his feet. "Probably. We may find a whole cache of forgotten tribbles when those walls come out, too."

"Saints preserve us!"

Before they left, Spock heard Kirk say affectionately, "Thanks again for...well, for being there, Bones. I guess I needed somebody to talk to about this."

"My pleasure, Jim," said McCoy in the same tone. "Just be patient with him. And congratulations!" Spock heard a resounding slap on the back. "I can tell you're on cloud nine."

"Thanks, Bones. I am."

The voices faded as the two left the booth and headed toward the door and away from the bar. Spock continued to sit in contemplation. He had a lot to consider. And he suddenly knew what to give Jim for his birthday.

Standing up, he headed for the door. There was a certain book he remembered seeing in that bookstore. He had some reading to do before Jim finished with Mr. Scott and returned to his quarters for the evening.

* *

Four hours later, Spock was finishing up a flurry of activity in his quarters.

His desk had been transformed into a cloth-covered dining table, complete with dishes full of James Kirk's favorite foods, a bottle of Saurian brandy (no Troyian whiskey--Spock didn't want his lover down with a headache tonight), and two glasses.

He surveyed the results critically. Then, judging them perfect, he went to the bedroom and smoothed the turned-down bed for the fifth time. Curiously, he ran one hand across the new gold-colored silk sheets. Strange. Illogical as it seemed, the sheets did feel 'sensuous'. He was sure the sentient silkworms of Kasimar II would have been most pleased had they known how appreciated were the results of their labor.

Turning, he studied the rest of the room. After pursing his lips in thought, he went to the wall and adjusted the heating unit to a cooler temperature. Then he ordered the lights in the bedroom off, so that the room was lit only by the glow of the firepot's flame.

Heading back into the office portion of the cabin, he commanded those lights dimmed to a soft, warm glow. Picking up the pulsating Argellian music cube from his desk/dining table, he held it in his hands, activating it with his body warmth. When he set it down again, a gentle, seductive music emanated from it. It would play for another two point twenty hours before needing to be 'recharged', the shopkeeper had promised.

Surveying his domain one last time, Spock nodded once in satisfaction and sat down in his desk chair. Picking up the book lying on the shelf behind him, he paged through it once again. He had read it thoroughly by now, taken its suggestions on some matters, ignoring others as being irrelevant or in questionable taste. Earlier, he had beamed back down to the space station to purchase the silk sheets, the brandy, the music cube, and the robe. The food processors had obligingly furnished the rest.

Standing up, book in hand, he wandered restlessly and a bit nervously (although he would never have admitted to the state) back to the bedroom. Sitting down on the bed, his keen eyesight perused relevant chapters again by the dim light of the firepot.

Under the chapter heading "Undressing Your Lover," his eyes scanned one or two interesting passages. Then fingering through the pages, he quickly reviewed the chapter "Love Talk" before moving onto "Sexual Techniques (Same-Gender)." He was just becoming immersed in the fascinating material when his equally keen sense of hearing registered sounds coming through the bathroom door from the adjoining cabin. Jim was home.

Suddenly and illogically nervous, Spock laid the book heedlessly on the shelf behind the bed and turned to straighten yet again the glistening sheets. He took a moment to admire the manner in which the golden material picked up the flickering light of the firepot, seeming to glow with an inner fire all its own. Just like Jim. Turning toward the bathroom, he tightened the belt on his knee-length, black silk robe (he really must send a note of commendation to the Kasimarian worms) and headed for Kirk's cabin. He was ready.

* *

As the door between Kirk's bathroom and bedroom slid open at Spock's approach, he peered into the room. Dark. Hearing movement in the lighted office area, he walked soundlessly past the bed and paused at the divider panel.

"Jim?"

Kirk was in the process of pulling his gold tunic over his head while simultaneously studying the day's messages on his computer screen. At Spock's soft query, he jumped.

Turning around, he eyed the Vulcan standing behind him with a wry expression. "God, Spock! You just scared ten years growth out of me!"

Spock raised a teasing brow and took the tunic from Kirk's hand, turning it right-side out and folding it neatly. "My apologies. However, should you not have finished your growth by now?"

Kirk poked him in the chest with a playful finger. "Vulcan tease," he accused, smiling.

At his finger's contact with its target, he suddenly became aware of his lover's attire. "Spock...what's that you're wearing?"

Spock carried the tunic into the darkened bedroom and laid it carefully on the end of the bed. Kirk followed him in, verbally activating the light so he could get a better look.

Spock turned and shrugged casually. "I purchased a new robe at the





Kasimarian silk shop on K-5 today. Do you approve?"

Running his eyes appreciatively over the lithe figure, Kirk gave a soundless whistle. "I'll say! It does positively wicked things for your coloring."

Uncertain as to whether or not he had just been complimented, Spock gazed down at himself with a puzzled frown. "Kasimarian silk is most exquisite...and rather costly, I fear. I should not have...."

"Oh, yes you should have," Kirk murmured as he stepped closer and trailed a finger down the robe's lapel. "You look sensational! You should splurge more often." The finger made a sensuous detour from the lapel and began an unhurried trip through the exposed chest hair.

Feeling himself beginning to lose control of the situation, Spock made a quick mental scan of the chapter, "Shedding Your Inhibitions". Exhaling decisively, he firmed his shoulders and his resolve. He had to start somewhere.

The enticing finger was now traveling south and preparing to explore the intriguing shadows between skin and loosely tied belt. Spock captured the finger gently, raised it to his lips, and licked it lightly with a warm, pointed tongue.

Kirk caught his breath in surprise.

Feeling more confident as a result of the satisfying reaction, Spock ran the trapped finger over the outline of his own lips, then parted them slightly, sucking the finger into his mouth and surrendering it to the moist caresses of his tongue. All the while, he kept his eyes trained steadily on Kirk's.

He felt his pulse quicken as Kirk inhaled sharply, the wide, golden eyes staring, mesmerized, back at him. Suddenly he understood Jim's earlier words to McCoy about the exciting sense of power when making love to a man of strength, of rendering that strength helpless with desire. What had Jim called it? A 'power trip'?

Yes, indeed. He was beginning to enjoy Jim's birthday present very much.

First things first, however. The ritual of gift giving was not to be rushed.

He gave the finger a final affectionate nip and released it. "Are you hungry, Jim?"

Still caught up in the excitement from such unexpected sensuality in his lover, Kirk could only breathe, "Yes, I am. But not for food." He stepped closer.

Spock stepped back. "That is unfortunate, as I have gone to considerable trouble to have a private dinner prepared for us." His brow rose in pretended irritation.

Kirk blinked. "Dinner? A private dinner?"

"Affirmative. In my quarters."

Kirk stared at him. "I thought you were the one who always insisted on the importance of commanding officers making an appearance in the O-Mess every evening for the sake of morale."

"Under normal circumstances, yes. However...not on the eve of the Captain's birthday."

Beginning to get the picture, Kirk grinned. "Oh, so this is the eve of the Captain's birthday, is it?"

"Indeed. And a gift awaits said Captain," he nodded his head toward the wall, "in the First Officer's cabin."

Kirk's eyes glowed. He glanced conspiratorially from side to side. "Well, now. Do you suppose the First Officer could wait for the Captain to take a shower and slip into something more...comfortable...before said First Officer presents said gift?"

Spock pursed his lips, appearing to think the matter over carefully. "I believe that would be agreeable to said First Officer. If said Captain hurries."

Reaching to unfasten his trousers, Kirk winked. "You've got a deal, mister."

Spock turned and headed toward the connecting bathrooms. "I shall await you next door."

"I won't be long," Kirk called over his shoulder.

Spock smiled as he stepped into his own bedroom, the door sliding shut behind him. On its other side, he could already hear Kirk whistling happily over the sound of the sonic shower.

So far, so good.

He studied his quarters again. The firepot cast a flickering glow over the otherwise darkened bedroom, alternating shadows and light across the welcoming silk-sheeted bed. He moved into the office area.

The music cube was still emitting softly, and the notes seemed to dance in time with the sporadic light from the bedroom. He reached down, cradled the cube warmly in his hands for a minute, then returned it to its place on the desk. After a thoughtful pause, he verbally turned down the office light a bit more.

He found himself waiting with a definite un-Vulcan impatience as time wore on. In human terms, he fidgeted.

Where was Jim?

Finally, he heard the sound of his bathroom door. After a moment, Kirk appeared at the divider panel. "Spock? What have you been up to today? God, this place looks sexy as hell!" His glance swept the dimly-lit rooms in appreciation.

Spock drew in his breath as he caught sight of his lover. "So do you," he breathed.

Kirk was wearing a robe Spock had never seen before, also knee-length and tied at the waist. Of a rich, forest-green silk, it was almost a twin to Spock's black one.

Spock decided that, in a universe of marvels, he had never beheld such beauty.

Kirk was standing with hands thrust deeply into the large pockets of the robe, his head tilting in mute appreciation of the music cube's quiet melody. At Spock's words, he looked up, smiling. "Oh, the robe? I've had it for three or four years. My sister-in-law gave it to me for my birthday." His smile saddened with remembrance. "Aurelan was always trying to get me to wear this color. Said it flattered me."

"She was correct. It does, I believe the expression is, 'positively wicked things for your coloring'."

His eyes clearing, Kirk grinned. "You think so? I've always felt like a damned fop in this thing. I had it buried so deep in my closet it took me twenty minutes to find it just now."

Spock held out a hand in invitation. "I noticed. It was, however, well worth the wait."

Taking the hand, Kirk joined him at the desk. His brows rose in surprise as Spock pulled one of the chairs out for him. "Thanks," he said as he sat.



Seating himself in the other chair, Spock picked up the brandy bottle, pouring a small amount in each of the glasses. Handing one to Kirk, he took the other, held it aloft, and toasted, "To the Captain's birthday. May he live long and prosper."

Kirk clinked his own glass against the other and met Spock's eyes. "Thank you. This is the best birthday the Captain's ever had," he said softly.

His stomach fluttering with excitement, Spock gazed back into the eyes that caught the dim lighting and sparkled like sun-burnished gold.

They sipped in unison.

Spock set his glass down and, reaching for the serving bowls, began to fill first Kirk's plate, then his own. Choosing only small amounts of the non-meat items for himself, he lavished everything else on his companion until Kirk held up a hand in wide-eyed protest.

"Easy there, babe. Bones will have both our heads if I get in the habit of eating like this! My god, you've really outdone yourself. Steak, deviled potatoes, corn pudding, pumpkin bread...." He stared at the Vulcan. "Spock...these are all my favorite foods! How did you know...?"

Spock was still savoring the sound of the pet name which he had noticed Jim using more and more lately when they were in the privacy of their quarters. According to the "Love Talk" chapter, such endearments were indicative of great affection and relaxed familiarity with one's lover. Somewhere deep inside his soul, Spock glowed.

Bringing himself back to reality, he cleared his throat and answered the question. "You will recall the cooking manual which Nurse Chapel compiled recently?"

"Oh, yeah. The one where she badgered us all for our favorite recipes?"

"The same. I prevailed upon her to allow me to borrow it in order to determine your tastes. Have I pleased you?"

Kirk was shaking his head in wonder. "Pleased me? You, my lover, have amazed me...as always." He leaned across the desk and kissed Spock on the lips.

The next half hour was spent in a companionable silence, Kirk enjoying his food with a blissful exuberance that was a joy for Spock to watch. Finally, they both leaned back in their chairs, too full to eat another morsel. Then Kirk spied an untouched serving dish.

"My god! Is that really raspberry shortcake?"

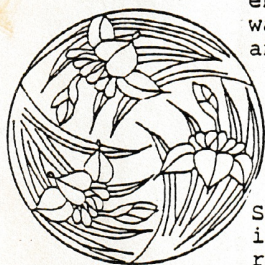
"Precisely."

"Spock," Kirk groaned, "my stomach would never forgive me if...." Seeing the disappointed look in the brown eyes that Spock was unsuccessful in hiding, Kirk finished, "...if I turned down my favorite dessert." He reached for the bowl and served them each a small portion of the rich concoction.

Smiling, he dipped his spoon into his own bowl and, leaning across the table slightly, offered it to Spock. Spock leaned forward and took the spoon into his mouth, swallowing the food and sensuously lapping at the spoon afterwards, sucking the last bit of juice slowly past his lips. Reaching up with one hand, he took the spoon from Kirk's fingers, dipped it into his own bowl, and returned the favor.

Kirk met Spock's eyes, opening his mouth willingly, and swallowed the food, then tilted his head and licked the full length of the implement, his eyes never leaving his lover's face. His tongue darted out one last time, lapped the spoon clean, then slowly licked the juice from his lips.

Spock stared, breath suspended, as the last drop of juice was tongued



away.

"Spock?"

"Mmmmmmm?" Spock managed, still gazing at the moist lips.

"I can think of only one dessert I love more than raspberry shortcake...." Kirk whispered.

Spock stared at the mouth forming the words. "Mmmmmmm?"

Kirk rose from his chair slowly, offering a hand to Spock. "Come here and I'll show you."

Spock sat dumbly, his eyes still on Kirk's mouth. He rose from the chair in a daze, clasping the outstretched hand. Finally, his gaze rose to the sparkling golden currents of Kirk's eyes. He shivered as flashes of heat coursed through his stomach. "I want you...." His breath carried the words on a sigh.

He saw the beloved eyes drift shut for a heartbeat, then open again with half-hooded lids. "What did you say...?" Kirk whispered.

"I want you."

Suddenly, with a ferocity he would not have believed possible a day ago, Spock exhausted his patience and grabbed the broad, green-silked shoulders. Ignoring Kirk's startled gasp, he descended with his mouth, crushing the lips beneath his with an almost angry passion. Pulling his lover's body closer, he ground their mouths together, forcing them open, his tongue dueling its way past teeth to do battle with its opposite.

When they ran out of breath he abandoned the mouth, only to blaze a hot trail down Kirk's neck, licking and biting his way to the indentation between neck and shoulder. Kirk threw back his head and inhaled a hissing breath through clenched teeth.

Frustrated with the silk cloth that dared to impede his progress, Spock tore off the green robe and threw it to the floor. Staring at the smooth chest revealed before his eyes, he paused only seconds, then plunged his mouth down again, into the hollow of the throat...sucking, biting...incoherent words vibrating in growls against the cool flesh beneath his mouth.

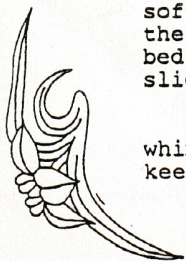
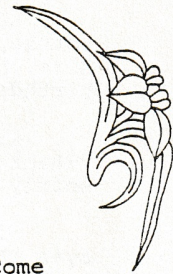
As Kirk moaned, his head still thrown back, Spock pulled away. "Jim...t'hy'la," his voice rasped, "I must have you...now...."

"Yes...." Kirk's answer was a faint whisper, pitched only for Vulcan ears.

Reaching downward, Spock scooped the human body into his arms and strode into the darkened bedroom...an ancient warrior carrying his mate into the caves of Vulcan. Laying his prize down on the glowing sheets, he reached blindly for the belt at his waist and tore at it, flinging the black robe away from him. He sank down onto the bed, his head at Kirk's hips. Seeking with his mouth, he nuzzled and licked his way to the penis that stood pulsing in its nest of golden curls. He pushed his own lower body insistently against Kirk's face, and groaned deep in his throat when eager lips settled on his erect organ, sucking it into the mouth and swallowing it whole. He groaned again and pushed closer, then began a rocking, thrusting motion, feeling himself gliding back and forth, back and forth across the velvet lips and into heaven itself....

He swallowed the penis that was in his own mouth and growled into the soft hair beneath his lips as he raked his teeth lightly up both sides of the shaft and down again, closing his throat muscles over the tip. The bed swayed with their rhythm, the slick sheets whistled as their bodies slid frantically to and fro against each other....

Then he felt the body inside his mouth tense, heard and felt the whimper from Kirk's throat as it vibrated against his own organ...heard a keening sound like an animal in pain...or a human in ecstasy.



Kirk pumped into his throat in silken streams as he came, tensing, pulling back, and pumping forth again and again until the streams ran dry and Kirk collapsed, mouth temporarily still as his body recovered.

Spock pulled back and out, turning to face his sated lover. His eyes, not to be denied, bored into the golden eyes of Kirk. "Jim...I need...."

Smiling tiredly, but willing and eager, Kirk nodded up at him and rolled over onto his stomach. Spock hissed through his teeth as he watched the muscles ripple within the rounded buttocks as Kirk settled himself. Spock leaned down, kissed the pale cheeks, trailed his tongue up and back down the line of the spinal column and into the valley between those sweet cheeks. Kirk moaned and drew his knees up under himself, raising his buttocks in eager offering.

Spock guided his stiffened penis up, between, and in, plunging with the groan of a starving man into the feast of his dreams. Pulling back, pushing in...a dance of passion offered and accepted, an exchange of give and take...until he felt the tremors turn into a single screaming tension, felt himself caught in stasis for a breathless moment, then falling down, down in a staccato rush to a blessed relief. He drained himself deep in the body beneath him.

Lying heavy on Kirk's back, his desire exhausted, realization began to flood back into him. What had he done? What had happened to his carefully choreographed plan of slow seduction? He had taken his gentle lover like a beast in heat!

Ashamed, afraid to meet Kirk's eyes, he cautiously withdrew himself and lay on his back next to his bedmate. He turned his face away.

He heard Kirk breathe a long sigh. "My god...."

Spock clenched his eyes shut. He couldn't face Jim's disappointment, his shock at this betrayal of trust.

He felt a hand on his chest, then the tickle of hair as Jim laid his head there. He felt the cool moisture of Jim's lips kissing first one coppered nipple, then the other.

"Oh, Spock...that was fantastic! I love you."

Spock turned his head, gazed into Jim's eyes. "Jim...I did not intend...."

Raising his head, Kirk kissed him on the lips, then pulled back to smile down at him. "I don't care what you intended. That was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

Spock blinked. "You enjoyed...? But I had planned to seduce you...."

Turning over, Kirk lay on his back and stretched, arms and legs sliding along the coolness of the sheets. He chuckled lazily. "Well, what do you think you just did?"

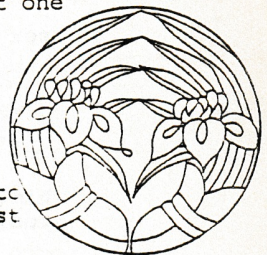
"I very nearly...raped you!"

Another chuckle. "There's a big difference between rape and seduction, babe. It's a little matter of willingness." He laid an arm lightly across Spock's sweaty chest. "In case you didn't notice, I was more than willing."

Spock closed his eyes in relief. If truth were told, he had been in such a state that he wasn't sure whether he would have cared if the willingness were there or not. "Happy birthday, Jim."

Kirk laughed in delight. "What a present! The best I ever had." He stretched again, arms over his head. His hand encountered something lying on the shelf behind him. Idly, he picked it up and brought it to his face. "What's this?"

Spock was mortified. The book! The embarrassing, damning book! The



book he had ended up ignoring completely.

Kirk had propped himself on one elbow to read the book's cover by the combined light of the firepot and that coming through the partition from the office. "This is written in both Vulcan and Standard." He read the title aloud: "How To Make Love To A Human." He looked up in surprised delight. "Spock!"

Spock cringed.

"Where did you get this?"

"In the bookstore on K-5," Spock sighed, prepared to confess his ultimate humiliation.

"That was some shopping trip! What's 'Shoyan' mean?"

"It is...the name of the author."

"That's a Vulcan name, isn't it? Spock! This was written by a Vulcan?"

Spock sighed again. "Yes."

Kirk was sitting up now, legs crossed under himself, eyes avidly straining to see the book better in the frail light. "A Vulcan wrote a sex manual on how to make love to humans!?"

"It is a pen name, obviously."

Kirk exploded in laughter. "Obviously! How the hell did he ever get away with it?"

"No one knows who he is. The book was written years ago and is found only off-Vulcan. I saw it in the bookstore today and recalled having once seen a copy as a child...in my father's study."

Kirk was chortling in unrestrained glee. "Sarek had a Vulcan-written sex manual on how to make love to a human!?"

"Jim...."

"Oh god! I love it!"

Kirk finally brought himself under control as a thought occurred to him. "You don't mean.... You used this as a guide for what you did tonight?"

Spock cleared his throat. "Unfortunately, I...lost control and...forgot everything I had read."

Kirk set the book aside and curled up close, his head resting on Spock's chest and fingers playing idly with the wiry hairs. He chuckled again. "If what you just did is from instinct alone, I don't know where the hell you ever got the idea you need a book to tell you how. You were incredible!"

"I merely thought...."

A smile formed against Spock's chest. "Well, it's the thought that counts."

Yawning, Spock said once again, "Happy birthday, Jim. I am pleased that your gift satisfied you."

Kirk hugged him hard. "You satisfied me. And I think, since that book's really a part of my present, I'll read through it tomorrow. Maybe I can learn a few pointers. My lover's half human, after all."

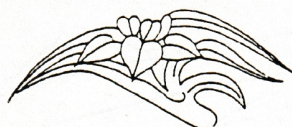
Spock tried to raise a brow in amusement but was too tired to bring it off. "Jim, I do not believe either of us requires such a book. Certainly not yourself."



"I don't know," Kirk said mischievously. "I may have to pay a visit to that bookstore myself tomorrow. I think I just decided what I'm going to buy for your next birthday."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed. I understand there's this book called The Sensuous Vulcan...."

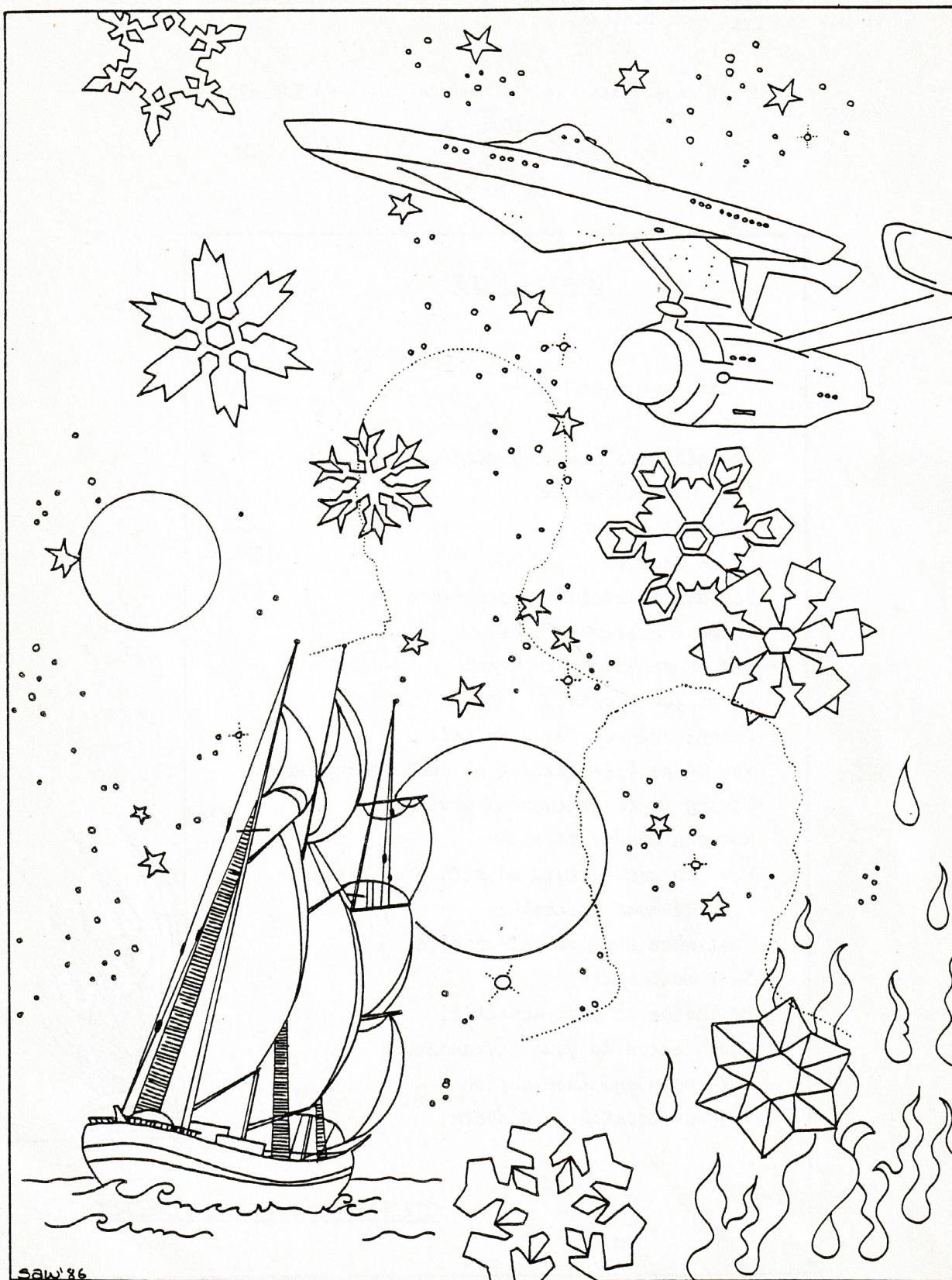


WAR-FIRE

I dare not look at you
Not now
You glow too brightly with glory.
I do not understand,
But must accept,
It is true...
You are beautiful at all times
To my impassioned eyes,
But never moreso than now
As we face death.
Danger enlivens your spirit,
You shine life against an encroaching dark
Daring it to extinguish your fire.
How can you do this?
How can you torture me with your presence?
You are most desirable
Just when you are untouchable.
So I must wait,
Patroklos to your Achilles,
Hephaestion to your Alexander...
Both pawn and inspiration
To your courtship of death.



TERE ANN RODERICK

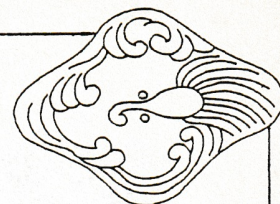


SKY HUNTER

Winter is in our life now
but no matter.
We are together as age touches our souls.
I remember years gone past,
starfields blooming as our future
unfurled before and we
strode the skies side by side,
your sharp eyes eagerly looking ahead.
Seeing all possibilities,
grasping every opportunity
to live your life to the fullest.
You allowed/asked me to come
sail the wilds of beyond with you.
I did.
Now we have settled,
remembrances drift around us and
yet the warmth of the fire,
the coolness of your skin even
the flames in your eyes
reflect the open sky as
once again we fly.

LISA JOAS

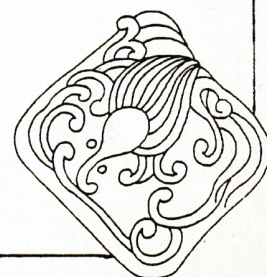




THE TAILS OF COMETS

This is the phantom,
this is the sea-change:
no longer black and white,
form shifts, encompassing
shards of amber and green
in skin too long without
the glow of you.
Decision lies in the hiding,
the endless masquerade
of costume and persona,
of mask and charade:
to leave the shadow behind
and step with you into
starlight? --
or to remain cloaked,
dark and mysterious?
Midnight flashes in your eyes --
the tails of comets,
the crush of dawn --
and answers fall,
dust on my hands,
as I turn toward the night --
toward the stars --
toward you.

DOVYA BLACQUE



COLD

Ice beckons
this lonely night;
all I feel is ice.
Another memory
dusted dry,
last spark of the fire,
shadowed now
with snow and dew.

FARIS VINCENT

WARMTH

Like coal
or flame
or sundown glow;
like summer
or spring
or night in winter;
like heaven
or hell
or this life I live;
like dawn
or dusk
or memories of you.

FARIS VINCENT



SETTING THE MAGIC FREE

Roberta

"Come."

The door slid open and McCoy stepped into the captain's quarters. "If the mountain won't come to me...", he stated and held up a full decanter of the infamous brandy.

Kirk leaned back in his chair, stretched his arms to relieve the tension of three hours' work and smiled at his friend. "I'm sorry, Bones. I hadn't realized I'd been neglecting you."

"Well, you have been pretty busy, getting back into the swing of things." McCoy rounded up glasses from the small built-in bar across the room, joined the captain at his desk and poured a healthy slug in each glass. "So, how ya all been doin'?"

"Look at this." Kirk waved a hand over the pile of tapes and paperwork burying his desk. "I've got a stack of reports from every department on the ship. The list of requisitions is enormous. Problems seem to be multiplying by the hour. Scotty's buried down below and I got the distinct impression I'm to stay out of his hair for a few days. Spock's up to his ears in the computer, though I managed to drag him away for a game of chess last night. Damn near had to make it an order, too. I hear you've got everybody walking on egg shells down in Sickbay. I've never felt so unorganized in my life." He grinned, his eyes bright and sparkling with life. "And I haven't had so much fun in years."

"I don't doubt that at all." The silvering head tilted. "'Course I don't think it's entirely the ship's doing."

Kirk's eyelids lowered and, though he tried not to, his eyes moved in the direction of Spock's quarters.

The doctor watched with more than a passing interest. "Do you think he'll ever tell us, or at least you, why he resigned and went back to Vulcan? And

not even to the Science Academy but into that Kolinahr thing?"

"I sure as hell hope so." Kirk's eyes came back to his drink and he swirled it around, then took a sip. "I've thought of every reason I could, and none of them make any sense."

I'll bet I can think of one or two. "Well, in the meantime, you're gonna have to get back in shape. You're out of condition, Captain." McCoy took the glare aimed at him with a chuckle. "Paper pushing is not conducive to battle readiness and if you're determined to command, you can't be at less than peak efficiency."

"I'm way ahead of you, Bones." The famous grin was complacently smug. "I've been doing laps in the pool all week and Spock and I start our workouts tomorrow."

"Mind if I watch? Should be interesting to see how long it takes before you cave in trying to keep up with him."

"Sadism isn't good for you, Doctor."

"It has its moments." The doctor lifted his glass in a salute, but whether he was saluting the captain or sadism was open to question.

The comline interrupted and McCoy was relegated to a minute of silent drinking while Kirk took care of business. By the time Kirk had signed off, the blue eyes were thoughtful. "I thought you liked being an admiral."

"I do, mostly. But here, on the ship.... I guess it's kind of...silly actually, but I like being called Captain. It feels...." He shrugged, unable to explain further.

"Right?"

"Yeah. It feels right. And besides, captains are only a little intimidating. While an admiral can be...."

"A pain in the ass?" McCoy helpfully interrupted.

Kirk chuckled and nodded before he remembered that he was one of 'those'. The glint in the blue eyes deepened and McCoy poured the admiral another drink.

"Add to that, you're more comfortable around the crew being just the captain. And that's good, because then they can be more comfortable around you. Nice how that works out, isn't it?"

"You haven't changed at all, you old sawbones."

"Sure I have. We all have." McCoy studied his friend for a moment. "It's going to take some getting used to, too. I mean, I keep seeing everyone in their golds, blues and reds. And those chauvinistic short skirts with all those lovely legs under them." He paused at the memory of Christine, Uhura, Janice, Letitia, Pauline.... *Hell, I could be here all night remembering.* "I miss the colors. Know what I mean?"

A long sigh filled the room. "Yeah, Bones. I know. But we can't stay still forever. We have to move on. We aren't kids anymore."

"Two and a half years at H.Q. and he's practically ready for retirement," McCoy grumbled and refilled his glass. "Well, Captain, sir, I for one don't feel any older at all. Just settled. Inclined to take it slower. Enjoy things more. Take time for me. As in 'smell the flowers'?" he added at Kirk's frown.

"I haven't been away from you that long. What are you trying to say?"

"That's just it, Jim; I shouldn't have to say anything. But if you really don't know what I'm talking about, then I can't help you."

"Did you come in here to ruin my mood? If so, you can take your cryptic mind and get lost. I've got things to do."

McCoy's grin was apologetic. "Sorry, Jim. I really didn't mean to spout off like that. It's just that...well, you were so busy being the captain, the Golden Boy of Starfleet, that you never took time for yourself. I don't want you to fall into that trap again, that's all."

"I had plenty of time for myself. And sometimes I didn't have to wait for shore leave to have it."

The doctor's eyes rolled. "Give me strength. Are you deliberately being obtuse? What I'm saying is that there's more to life than the casual lay or commanding a Starship, as rewarding as that is for you. Just don't forget that you won't always have a command. Hasn't being buried alive for two and a half years taught you anything?"

"Yeah, Bones. It taught me something." Kirk's look was steady, hard; but McCoy saw through to the hurt. "I learned that looking back was as painful as trying to see ahead. And as useless as the present."

Well, it's not much, but it's a start. "And now that you have the ship back?" *And Spock?*

Kirk's eyes lowered to his drink and he slowly smiled. "I'm going to do everything I can to keep her." *And what she's brought back to me.*

"Then I wish you the best, Jim. Though I probably don't need to. You always were a lucky bastard."

"If you say so." Kirk decided to change the subject, and pulled out a sheaf of papers from near the bottom of the pile. "As long as you're here, I'd like to go over...."

"Oh, no you don't. I'm off duty. And you should be, too."

As if on cue, the door chime announced another visitor and when Kirk answered, neither was surprised to see the commanding Vulcan walk in. "I did not know you were occupied, Captain. I shall return later."

"Nonsense," Kirk halted him before he could turn away. "You're not



interrupting anything. Sit down."

The Vulcan went to the empty chair next to McCoy and his naturally graceful movement took the captain's interest, which McCoy had no trouble seeing or understanding, and he quickly hid himself in his drink. *I'd love to be there when it finally hits you, Jim-boy.*

The blue eyes lifted back up to the Vulcan and he was pleased to see that the newly found softness was still there. Ever since Spock had made his astounding discovery from V'jer, his demeanor had been more open, downright friendly -- for a Vulcan; a complete reversal from the creature who had come on board only a week before.

McCoy sat back, watching and listening as they discussed the orders that had come in that morning for a short but boring duty of conveying a new ambassador and her family to her post back on Earth. And of course, there was the happy prospect of picking up the new uniforms that had been promised. Everyone had seen pictures of the maroon and black outfits with their color coded, turtleneck sweaters and new emblems of rank.

The doctor's idle listening changed into a subtle scrutiny. Before they'd all gone in different directions, he had had ample opportunity to observe his two friends -- as he was doing once more -- and not just out of habit.

I was so sure that they were heading into something special, that Spock's... desertion of Jim shocked me nearly as much as it did Jim.

When Spock had awakened in Sickbay after his meld with V'jer and had taken Kirk's hand in an unexpected display of emotion, which Kirk had quickly returned, McCoy had seen that it...that specialness...was still there between them.

What's it gonna take for you two to stop saying one thing and meaning another? I've got half a mind to.... Hold it right there, he sternly admonished himself. You've already got half a mind if you're thinking of sticking your big nose into this. Besides, it would take away the fun I'm having watching them work their way toward each other. I just wish they were doing it faster. This waiting can get on a guy's nerves.

McCoy came out of his thoughts to find it just a bit too quiet, as nobody was talking. He quickly finished his drink, said good night and headed for the door, only to make a quick U-turn and grab the decanter. "Can't play chess with a snootful, Captain; you'd only lose faster."

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"Are you sure I did not interrupt your talk with him?" Spock asked after McCoy had left.

"Not at all," Kirk reassured him with a slow smile. "He probably felt your impatience to get our game going."

Spock's brow lifted at the gentle teasing but he said nothing as he

followed his friend into the living area where their game was already in progress. Kirk had quit last night when he'd found himself about to make a move that with anyone else would have been merely reckless, but with the Vulcan, sheer stupidity.

"I believe it is your move, Admiral."

"Thought we'd agreed you were going to stick with 'Captain'." Spock's smile was a silent one but Kirk saw it as easily as if the thin lips had actually moved.

"Very well...Captain."

Kirk smiled to himself. *How come it never sounds like that when anybody else calls me Captain?* If he'd stayed with that thought another moment, he might have figured out the exact reason why he preferred that title to any other.

His mind was already on the game in progress and having previously figured out what his move would be, Kirk positioned his knight, then sat back and watched with gleaming eyes as his partner tented his fingers and tapped his lips with them. That was expected, but the addition of the right eyebrow said that once again he'd made an inspired, if unexpected, move.

While Spock was concentrating on the game, Kirk took the opportunity to look his fill. There hadn't been many chances since they'd been reunited to indulge himself with the sheer joy of just looking at his friend, so he wasn't about to let this one slip by.

It's so damn good having you with me again. I've missed you, Spock. The sound of your voice. The way your head tilts when the computer comes out with an answer you don't like. Our chess games, even getting my ass beaten in the gym. Your eyebrow when you're trying not to laugh, or be indignant...oh so many things. And yet I forgot some things too. Like how black your hair is. Odd that I could have forgotten that it's as black as space with its own glittering lights shining off of it. And I don't remember it being so soft looking. I wonder what it feels like?

Kirk's eyes lowered to his hands as he tried to imagine running his fingers.... The thought was stopped instantly and, clearing his throat, he sat up straighter and pulled his wayward mind back to the game.

Spock had been mildly distracted by the small cough and as he made his move he wondered what had caused Kirk to make it and to shift selfconsciously in his chair. He knew there had to be a reason. But what?

The first thought that came to him was whether or not Kirk was working toward asking him why he'd left in the first place. And if that was it, he still didn't know what his answer would be. He would not lie to Kirk, but neither could he confess his feelings for him.

The thought of Kirk rejecting him as a lover and mate, while emotionally important to him, was a minor consideration when compared to Starfleet's regulations about command relationships -- those who wanted that relationship officially recognized, anyway. And, for Spock, any relationship he shared with Kirk, that went beyond friendship, he wanted to be official -- for all the

reasons there were. Marriages on board the ship were quite acceptable between crewmen -- Kirk had performed a few of those himself -- but H.Q. would only sanction a command marriage under the most extreme circumstances.

For a Vulcan, 'extreme' meant Pon Farr. And while H.Q. had come to recognize the seriousness of that, they would not understand that, bonded or not, official or not, Spock's mind and heart had chosen -- that he would not, could not, accept another.

Spock's Time could be in two point three years, or two point five...or eight. It was an unknown factor he could do nothing about at the present time. He had to cope with the here and now, the future would have to wait.

Jim's having to relinquish his command in order to...marry me would not be seen as extreme circumstances. He would simply be given a ground position. I have seen the change in him since he has been among his stars again. I cannot, will not, put him in the position of having to choose between his command or me. There would also be the unwelcome reality that not even his rank would protect him from those who could not accept us. And if that person was of some importance...? No, I shall be content with what I have.

The words were a variation on the 'I am a Vulcan, there is no pain' theme. The correlation went unnoticed. As did the one between Kirk's happiness and their being together again.

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Kirk landed on his back with a thud and, when his head cleared, he heard a throaty chuckle from somewhere behind him. Pushing himself farther back onto the top of his head, he directed his eyes toward the sound and stuck his tongue out at the perpetrator.

McCoy laughed even harder at the picture of the captain, usually upright with dignity and decorum, now on his back, and half upside down, displaying a childish reaction to a well earned laugh at his expense.

"Perhaps we should stop for today, Jim. It would not be wise to do too much this first time." The calm words brought Kirk's attention back to his partner. It wasn't the words themselves that caught his attention as much as the fact that they were said without the use of any extra exertion. Like lungs fighting for air.

Quelling the urge to stick his tongue out again, Kirk relaxed his body fully onto the mat. "Okay, if you're ready to quit." He was rewarded with a slight movement at the corners of the Vulcan's mouth.

"I would have thought that experience would have taught you the benefits...", Spock's voice trailed off as laughing eyes and a brilliant smile were aimed up at him. He needed, wanted this side of Kirk and was glad his friend needed so little encouragement to indulge his sense of humor.

The offered hand was taken and the human pulled himself up. "In that case,

how about a swim to cool down?

"Yes, of course," Spock agreed, releasing Kirk's hand as quickly as he could without making it seem as if the touch was unwelcome.

Having seen what he'd come for, McCoy left.

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The smaller pool was occupied when they entered the water, but when they stopped after ten slow laps, it was to find that the others had gone and they were alone.

"That was nice of them," Kirk commented while floating on his back in the middle of the pool.

"Perhaps it was your tendency to take over the area which made the decision for them," Spock responded as he worked his way to the steps.

Is he teasing me? The captain's head lifted so far his body slid down into the water. He struck out with a scissors kick and a full stroke, getting to Spock before he'd reached safety. Grabbing the thinner shoulders, he pulled him over onto his back and into the water. Spock came up sputtering, but Kirk was ready for him and, with a perfect slice of his hand, cut the water to send a wall of it into the Vulcan's face. When Spock lunged after him without wiping his eyes clear, Kirk felt it prudent to get out of the way, only he was laughing so hard he couldn't get his body coordinated enough to move, let alone get loose when the strong arms wrapped around him.

Spock held onto him long after he should have let go because Kirk was still laughing so hard he would have sunk without the support. And Spock was enjoying the closeness so much that several happy moments had passed before he realized that Kirk had stopped laughing and was lying quietly in his arms.

He let go with a start and Kirk sank away. He came up, flipped the water from his head and face to see Spock swimming away. He took out after him and they swam a few more laps before getting out and drying off.

"Dinner in an hour, Mr. Spock?" Kirk casually asked.

Spock dropped the towel and picked up his robe. "Yes, of course, Captain." He gave a small nod and left.

Kirk's composure fell the instant the door had closed. Dropping the towel, he looked at his shaking hands. Then his knees started to quiver and he sank to the floor.

What happened? One minute we were playing and the next...? The next I... I couldn't breathe. I couldn't even look at him. I was scared to death to move. Why? What was I afraid of? That he'd stop holding me? That he'd see?

His mind shied away from answering that one, but his hands went to his arms and he slowly rubbed the places where Spock's body had touched him. They went

lower, moving lightly over his smooth chest, across his stomach, his abdomen, down to his thighs and back up to his groin. He remembered every place that had touched the Vulcan and his eyes closed on a moan when his fingers brushed his beginning erection.

He remembered other times when Spock had touched him, held him, all within the line of duty, and each thought brought the remembrance of another until he couldn't stand it another second and, yanking on his robe, went to shower and dress. He was grateful to see that Spock had already left.

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The Vulcan had been cornered by one of the science techs as he'd left the gym, so he'd had no time to consider what had happened by the time he'd stepped into the Officer's Mess and found Kirk waiting for him at their table. Relief was strongly felt when he saw that the doctor was there too, because he wasn't ready to meet Jim alone. He needed time to analyze, because up to that unexpected moment, his feelings had all been confined to a special place in his mind. But now.... No, he wasn't ready for what had happened to him in the pool.

But one question persisted: *What had Jim felt?*

The human's smile was normal and there was nothing different in either his manner or conversation. Thus, Spock could only conclude that he hadn't been affected at all during the short time he'd been holding him.

Spock ate sparingly, his appetite having diminished, and retired as early as he could. But his meditation did not take away the bitter taste of unexplained disappointment.

McCoy was Kirk's chess partner that night and happily won two games, declining a third. "Don't you think losing two to me in one sitting is enough? Besides, after your workout, you're practically asleep. Go to bed," he ordered.

At the mention of sleep, Kirk's hand had to cover the yawn he couldn't stop. "Sounds like a good idea," he mumbled. Getting up, he headed for his bed, pulling off his shirt as he went and tossing it on a chair.

McCoy watched, eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Why aren't you bothered by the fact that I beat you? Twice."

"Should I be?" Kirk absently inquired while taking off the awkward booted pants.

"In the past you've gone so far as to threaten never to play another game with me. I'm good, but I'm not Spock, so...." McCoy stopped and stared at the captain's sudden inattentiveness. "What is it, Jim?"

Kirk didn't hear him, he was staring at nothing, but in his mind he was back in the pool, being held in warm, strong arms, against a warmer, stronger body. He felt himself flush with heat.

McCoy witnessed the color darkening Kirk's face. "What the hell's the matter with you?"

"What?" Hazel eyes focused to see the doctor standing over him. "Oh... good night, Bones."

McCoy stared at him for a few moments more, then decided it was too late and he wasn't in the mood to drag this out of him. But the captain was working his way toward an examination; much more of this odd behavior and he was going to get it.

He left with a worried frown wrinkling his forehead. *He sure is acting strange. Come to think of it, so is Spock.* It hadn't escaped the doctor's notice that the Vulcan had turned in much earlier than usual tonight and he hadn't seen Kirk to his cabin -- a routine that had been started again after his time of revelation. *Something is going on with those two. I wonder.... Uh uh, you just put your nose away and stay out of it,* he ordered himself for the second time in as many days.

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The next day was normal enough, what with the picking up of their passengers and turning back for Space Dock at Earth. But the captain had an extra source of disquiet to make his day longer. He was sore as hell and, because he didn't want to give McCoy the satisfaction of saying 'I-told-you-so', suffered instead of going to Sickbay and getting something to ease his pain.

However, he had forgotten his first officer's uncanny ability to read him. When they'd entered the lift at the end of their shift, Spock offered, with a reluctant eagerness, to give him a rubdown before he retired for the night.

Kirk was silent a moment, waiting for his heart to settle back down. "All I really need is a good night's sleep, Spock. But thanks for the offer. Uh... same time in the gym tomorrow?"

The black brow lifted, disappointment fighting with relief. He was surprised to be turned down and at Kirk's willingness to continue with the workouts so soon. "Do you not wish another day to recover?"

"From what? I'm a little sore, that's all. Waiting won't help me get back into shape."

"That is true," Spock conceded. "Very well, I will meet you in the gym tomorrow. Now, if you will excuse me, there are a few things I need to attend to before I retire, so I will say good night to you now."

The lift stopped and Kirk stepped out, turning back to see that the Vulcan wasn't following him. "Yeah...a...good night, Spock." The door slid shut, but he remained standing in the corridor, staring at it. *What was that all about? Surely he wasn't insulted because I said I didn't want the rub down?*

His sigh was audible and self-accusing as he turned and headed for the Mess Hall. *Didn't want it? Shit! That's exactly what I do want.* His hands

on me again. *With nothing between my skin and his.*

A shudder ran down his spine at the revelation and he felt suddenly weak, his groin clenching at that unexpected thought. His eyes closed in an attempt to regain himself and he nearly collided with the wall near the Mess doorway.

"Something wrong with your eyes, Captain?" The familiar voice coming from behind him cut through the fog and he let McCoy take his arm and guide him to the nearest table.

"There is nothing wrong with me, damnit," Kirk protested, a bit harsher than he'd meant to. "Just...."

"Just what?" McCoy asked when the words stopped. The blue eyes, trained and experienced, didn't need scanners and tests for this. "Just leave you alone?"

Kirk's grin was sheepish as he sat down. "Yeah," he confessed.

"All right. I will. For now," McCoy warned. "But if this keeps up, you're getting a thorough going over."

McCoy's little inner voice was shouting in his ear, completely drowning out the talk he'd had with himself about sticking noses in where they didn't belong. But this was just too damn good to pass up. "Whatever it is, I hope it's not catching. Spock told me the same thing earlier."

Now that wasn't strictly true, but then neither was it a lie. He preferred to call it an interpretation of what would have been the obvious thing for Spock to have said had the Vulcan answered with words instead of an eyebrow.

Kirk's interest was immediate. "Something wrong with Spock?"

And McCoy didn't miss it. "Not that I can see. But I get the impression he's...preoccupied. Like he's trying to work something out." *Just like you are.*

"Well, that's not surprising. He's always got a problem or two in that brain of his." Kirk stood up. "You joining me for dinner?"

McCoy shook his head. "Sorry, got a date." He nodded towards the door and left to meet the lovely brunette who had just stepped into the room and was obviously looking for someone.

Kirk sighed and watched him go. *Smell the flowers, Bones? Maybe I would, if my nose still worked.* He started to sigh again, caught himself and began to wonder why he seemed to be doing a lot of this useless activity lately. *You're starting to sound like Spock.* Another sigh escaped him. He swore and went to get the dinner he didn't really want.

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A few days later, the ambassador and her family had been safely delivered to Earth, signalling the end of a long and boring week for everyone.

With the possible exception of the doctor. McCoy had been kept busy watching and waiting for something to break in the silent and unacknowledged war of feelings between the ship's captain and first officer. But the week ended with him being disappointed, exasperated and just a bit more than annoyed.

The captain's week had been filled with restless days and unfulfilled nights, ending with an overworked hand and a bad case of frustration. Because even the old reliable fantasies were no longer any good. If they didn't include the beautiful male next door, they just didn't work.

Spock's week merely ended.

While the ENTERPRISE was in Space Dock Scotty requested the time to thoroughly check out the new phaser relays. Since the ship wasn't urgently needed anywhere else, The-Powers-That-Be gave their okay and those crewmembers who weren't needed were cleared for the week the testing would take. Scotty and his people would get a chance for shore leave in shifts.

Kirk was as happy about the unexpected free time as his crew and celebrated by immediately asking Spock to join him in one of his favorite pastimes. Camping.

Spock's unexpected, and quietly eager, agreement was as surprising to him as it was to the captain.

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Kirk came back from his swim in the cold water of the nearby lake and looked for Spock, even knowing that he wouldn't be back this soon. A short walk for the Vulcan meant he'd be gone at least three hours. He rubbed the towel over his hair again, getting the last of the wetness. His skin was cool from the water, but the sun was hot enough, so there was no reason for getting dressed. He stretched out on his bedroll and, closing his eyes, let the sun finish drying him.

He woke up from his nap and, checking the chronometer, saw that only forty minutes had gone by. Spock would be gone for a while longer yet.

"Damnit! Can't I keep him off my mind for more than a minute?"

No, his mind calmly answered. *And you know why.*

"I know, damnit. I know."

He was no longer questioning what he felt for his first officer, his best friend. His male, Vulcan best friend. He'd spent days trying to figure out why it should be him. Why not any of the others? Why even another male? But there had been no answer, only the continuing buildup of feelings he'd tried to stop and couldn't.

What am I going to do? Ever since we've been here, I've been trying to work up the courage to tell him how I feel. But he was beginning to believe

that the famous James T. Kirk, protector of the galaxy, commander extraordinaire, was a devout coward.

Taking a chance was one thing, but doing the wrong thing this time could mean more than just losing his physical life. It could mean the loss of what was dearest to him.

I've already lived...existed without him once. Never again! He repeated the vow he'd made after Spock's return. Had that really been such a short time ago?

Without volition, his eyes closed and he thought about their regained closeness. Savoring each one, he went over every word and look, all the special moments on the Bridge, and the even more precious ones when they were alone.

His groin tightened and he swore at himself. But a moan deep in his throat, broke the restraint of his hands and they went to his penis which was already hardening from the pictures his mind was feeding him: Spock, lying on his bed, nude, waiting for him, reaching for him, their mouths joining, tongues entwining, tasting, hands searching, caressing, bodies touching, needing, wanting, straining.... He felt his mouth moving down across the hot skin, then wrapping around a cock as hard as his own and he sucked, gently at first, then harder as his own need for completion spiraled higher. And then hands were pulling him away, turning him over....

The fantasy was fast reaching its end. It had been three days since the last one, and Kirk strained, his back muscles tightening as he lifted his hips in an effort to get his cock deeper into his hand and then, with a cry breaking through his lips, he came.

He lay panting, his body damp with sweat, his stomach scattered with white drops. His eyes burned with unshed tears. He'd needed the release, but it hadn't been what he'd wanted.

Cursing himself for a million kinds of fool, he grabbed the wet towel and cleaned up, then pulled on his pants and tried desperately to lose himself in the book he'd brought.

The sun was well past its crest when footsteps made him realize that he'd actually lost track of the time. But he knew he wouldn't be able to count on that happening for the remainder of their time here. *So how the hell am I going to make it through another four days? And why the hell did I think this would be anything but torture?*

"I am sorry to have been so long," Spock apologized as soon as their eyes met.

"Found something interesting to study?" *How is it possible to carry on these dumb conversations when all I want to say is I....*

"Yes, I...did." Spock's slight hesitation hadn't gone unnoticed, but Kirk saw no reason to comment on it. Instead, he told Spock that he'd waited to have lunch with him.

"There was no need. I shall eat later." Spock went to his bedroll across

from the now-cold campfire, sat cross legged and, lifting his face to the warmth of the sun, closed his eyes.

Kirk's eyes devoured the unsuspecting Vulcan. He knew something was bothering Spock. The short, clipped sentences were a giveaway. And he didn't like it. He wondered if Spock was beginning to pick up on his feelings. That thought brought both fear and hope. With effort, he made himself concentrate on his book instead.

After a bit, Kirk finally sought out something to eat. When he'd finished, he saw that Spock was still in his own little world, so he went back to his bed, but didn't bother with the book this time. He was more than content with the silent company.

When Spock finally opened his eyes, they went automatically to Kirk. But at the sight of him lying on his back, bare chested, stretched out with his hands behind his head and looking warm and inviting, he quickly closed them again. Which was an error he was too late to reverse as a wave of heat went through his body that nearly sealed his nerves together.

SPOCK!

His mind heard his name again as the human had cried it out when he'd climaxed. That call, more than what he had seen, had sent his heart pounding, flooding his body with a raging fire of desire and need, scorching every part of him it touched.

For he had been there at that private moment. Having no intention of staying, he'd found himself unable to move. Unable to do anything but breathe, and even that with difficulty.

Jim had been so beautiful lying there, his body glistening with sweat from the sun and his exertions. Eyes tightly shut in concentration, the smooth chest heaving with each breath, hands rubbing, caressing, squeezing.

Spock had felt his own hands opening and closing in rhythm with Jim's as his hips had begun thrusting upward into that one last, final push, and then...the sound of his name.

My name? Spock had questioned in shocked surprise. *You think of me at such a moment?* It hadn't taken more than a thought to accept that his captain wanted him. But instead of being elated, the knowledge only made his own feelings harder to bear.

I, too, wish our fantasies were real. But your desire.... Is that the extent of your feelings for me? I need more, Jim. So much more. But no matter the depth of your feelings, it is not to be. I could not bear to be separated from you again. No matter how short the duration.

He couldn't accept just a physical relationship between them. He needed the security of at least a mental link with his chosen one. And the minute that commitment between them was discovered, he'd be transferred -- which would mean they would be together only now and then -- or Kirk would relinquish his

command and take a desk job. Neither was acceptable.

The silent words of reality had helped Spock to turn and walk away.

Spock's lids lifted again and, with a sudden start, his heart took off and his lungs constricted, making breathing difficult again. It seemed as if he'd spent much of his day simply trying to keep enough air in his lungs.

The look in the hazel eyes was so deep and open, he nearly fell into them. He blinked, and stared again. *I cannot be seeing.... No, it is only what I want to see.... Jim is not....*

He was drowning, being drawn deeper into the desire, the need, the...love? *This is wrong. So much to risk for the here and now. I must not allow myself to.... I must be strong. To know your touch would be an exquisite purgatory. Resist. Control.*

Kirk's lips parted, and Spock's gaze was drawn to the movement. The tip of a pink tongue peeked out to moisten dry lips and Spock's eyes closed on a silent groan as he gave up the struggle. Resistance was now impossible. He rose gracefully to his feet and, while he was still rational enough to know there would be consequences, he ruthlessly set them aside to be dealt with later and stepped forward to take what he knew was his, to have a part of what he so desperately wanted.

Kirk had been watching the Vulcan and the longer he'd looked, the harder it had become to keep his feelings safely inside. And when their eyes had met, he no longer had the strength to hide it, any of it. But he didn't speak, for if nothing was said, Spock could pretend he hadn't understood.

Red blood was racing, pounding so hard it hurt and Kirk's body was beginning that all-too-familiar ache. Spock's visual reaction had set Kirk's nerves tingling. He didn't move, so afraid, that if he did, Spock would run.

As Spock drew closer, he watched in fascination as the hazel eyes widened, the look deepening as the color turned to a golden amber. He'd never seen that happen to Kirk's eyes before.

Unknowingly, his own dark eyes became bright with passion as color suddenly flooded Kirk's face and chest. Spock's neck and ears darkened when he caught the movement at Kirk's crotch. Seeing what was happening to his friend, what he was doing to him, made his own body burn, as blood, hot as the Mating Fever itself, roared through his veins, flooding into his starving cock, filling it with molten steel. He wanted this man as he'd never wanted anything in his life.

Spock pulled off his shirt and Kirk's stomach flipped over. He watched avidly, eyeing every move as the Vulcan casually leaned over and pulled off one boot and sock. Just as slowly, he did the same with the other foot.

Sweat broke out over Kirk's body when Spock's hands went to his pants. Hot, hungry, starving eyes stared unblinkingly as the supple fingers worked the fastenings open and pants and briefs were slid down, kicked aside. And Spock was nude.

Kirk went weak, melting with a desire he'd never known before. He got an arm under himself and pushed up, only to freeze as it finally registered in his shocked mind that this was Spock who was standing before him, nude, hard, ready, wanting him. Wanting sex.

But why? There's never been the slightest hint that.... No! he determinedly ordered. I don't give a shit if he's only wanted this for ten seconds. Or if it's only the sex he wants, not me. I'll handle that later. I want him so badly I'll take whatever he's offering, for whatever reason. As long as it lasts, he's mine!

Spock was noticeably trembling by the time the human got his own shaky legs under him and could take the few steps that brought them to within inches of each other. Slowly, Kirk lifted his mouth and Spock lowered his. The instant their lips met, Kirk knew that he had lived his entire life for just this moment.

First kisses are usually a time of hesitation, of being awkward and shy, uncertain and a little fearful. But when their lips touched and Spock felt the questing tongue sliding gently against his lips, there was no hesitation as he opened his mouth and accepted the cooler tongue into his waiting warmth. No uncertainty, no fear, because this was right.

With a muffled groan, Spock wrapped his arms around the heaving chest, pulling him close, as he'd done in the pool, and he took the willing mouth with a confidence that surprised them both.

Spock instinctively began sucking on the alien tongue and Kirk suddenly needed air. Tearing his mouth away, he fought for it, pulling in deep, ragged breaths while his head used Spock's shoulder for support. Slowly, it came to him that he was using Spock's entire body for support while the strong legs and arms balanced him.

"Spock...I....," his voice cracked. He swallowed and tried again. "With all the wishing, the dreaming, all the hoping and praying I've done, I can't believe I'm going to say this." He lifted his head and gave Spock his eyes, his trust. "If we stop now, nothing will have happened."

Spock had to be given the chance to clear his mind, to back away. Nothing else could have made him utter the words. Let alone even think them.

"Do you truly believe there is a difference whether we stop now or we make love?" With those words, reality tried to make itself heard again, but it was too late. Every part of him, mind and body, was focused on the man standing so close to him. For the first time in his life, Spock shoved reality aside.

"No. There's no difference," Kirk admitted. "How could there be? But sex isn't even normal for you. Let alone with a male."

"And for you it would be?"

"Only with you." Kirk's eyes were bright with an inner glow and the words came pouring out. "I love you. I've always loved you. But I didn't know how deep it had gone. The wanting...gods, Spock, I didn't know how much I've wanted you. You're the most beautiful thing in my life." His lips brushed the corner

of the Vulcan's mouth and he whispered against the soft skin, "My unexpected and priceless gift."

Spock was stunned, totally incapable of speech, for Kirk's words were his own. Kirk's feelings were the mirror of his. Even in his innocence, he knew he would never know such a moment as this again. But his mind cried out in shock. *What have we done? I thought we would only be sharing this moment. I do not want to stop, but how can I not? I do not want to....*

The silence, and the blank look on the Vulcan's face, was killing Kirk.

Oh gods, what have I done? I've declared myself without thinking. Spock obviously wants me, but does he want...was he ready for that confession? Is he just human enough to want the sex without the love? Am I giving him something he doesn't want? And can't return?

Questions, horrible questions and even more terrifying answers flooded Kirk's mind until he couldn't think at all. The sudden indecision tore through him and he stiffened in the gentle embrace, his face showing unconcealed horror at what he'd done.

The movement in his arms brought Spock's attention back to Kirk and he saw the emotions which were too strong to hide. They were so easily read that he didn't need his hands on Kirk to know what was happening in the man's mind. But before he could say a word, Kirk was pushing out of his arms and starting to run.

It is not supposed to be like this, Spock silently protested. *We are being drawn deeper into where we cannot stay. But I cannot leave him like this. To think that I do not....*

"No!" Spock's command stopped the flight instantly and Kirk stood quivering as he heard the Vulcan coming up behind him. "I cherish thee. My unexpected and priceless gift." Spock whispered into a rounded ear from behind, repeating the words, and the loving tone, which Kirk had used.

Kirk nearly fainted with relief and Spock caught him, his arms going around the muscular body to cross over the pounding heart and Kirk gripped the strong arms, letting his head fall back onto the shoulder behind him.

"Can you really believe that your feelings for me are unacceptable?" Spock's voice betrayed his disappointment that Kirk could think that. But it also held a trace of pain at the memory that, at one time, the words had been true.

The captain snuggled deeper into the arms holding him. "There is a difference, my Vulcan, between desire and loving and being in love." *And why couldn't I see it when I'd crossed those lines?*

Spock turned Kirk around and framed the smiling face with his hands, his lips curving into his own special smile. "My understanding of those differences is not precise. All I know is that I have never felt for anyone what I feel for you. I...do...." His throat was suddenly tight and it was hard to get the words out. He knew he didn't need to say them. Indeed, he wasn't even sure they should be said. But fate, and love, was already against them. *It will be harder to sever the memories of our time together, but I want this time as much as he does. I shall willingly pay the price. That his love would also have to pay*

the cost of pain was mitigated by what Kirk stood to lose if they continued to love each other in this way.

Kirk hoped he knew what it was Spock wanted to say, and he tried to make it easier for him. He held Spock's hand tighter to his face and stared into the dark eyes, offering support. Spock shook his head, declining it, speaking the words as only a Vulcan in love could say them; gently, honestly, deeply, with total commitment, and in a throaty voice that took a mere human's breath away.

"I do love you, Jim. I love you."

Hazel eyes filled and Kirk's face fell against Spock's throat. "I've dreamed of hearing you say that."

The nonexistent space between them disappeared as they tightened their hold on each other. Their bodies fit perfectly and Kirk's heart began to race as he leaned into the strong arms holding him. He settled his hips even closer, feeling his cock being pressed against his balls, feeling the heat from the Vulcan enfold him like a loving blanket.

Kirk turned his face into Spock's neck and kissed him, his mouth open, his tongue wet and warm against the Vulcan's skin. He gently sucked on the corded neck muscle, knowing he would never be able to describe what he was tasting because he'd never tasted anything so wonderful before.

He eased away just enough for Spock's head to lower and their lips met, softness touching warmth. Suddenly shy, they pulled back to stare at each other. The look of wonder in the brown eyes gave Kirk the courage to pull the dark head back to him. It came to him that the black hair was as rich and soft as he'd thought it would be and he brought his other hand up to give it the chance to feel, too.

This time Spock had tilted his head even more as their mouths touched and Kirk enfolded him even tighter in his arms. Spock's hands slid over the smooth back, his knees weakening as his palms traced the living sculpture. Needing the support, he pulled his lover closer to him, his fingers digging into the muscled buttocks through the denim.

This wasn't nearly enough for Kirk and he pushed away to strip off his pants. Then he was back, a low moan escaping as their fully naked bodies touched for the first time. Kirk rubbed himself against the hotter skin, feeling the prickling of the hairier groin and the unaccustomed, but delightful presence of another cock.

Spock was again leaning down to him, clearly wanting his mouth to be reclaimed. Kirk pushed his tongue inside, moving deeply into the delicious cavern, then back to suck as Spock had done to him. He wanted to hear Spock moan, to beg for him, but he was beginning to think that maybe he'd beat him to it.

He brought his hands back to the treasured face and slid a leg in between Spock's tautly muscled thighs. The movement brought their hip bones into play and increased the pressure on their cocks. Kirk's head swam and he tightened his hold on the Vulcan to keep from falling.

You haven't even touched me with hand or mouth yet and I'm already near to bursting! It didn't surprise Kirk that he didn't need anything more in the way of foreplay. A smile formed in his mind at the remembrance of when Spock had stripped off his pants to reveal that gorgeous erection. *And I hadn't touched you yet, either,* came the delightful thought.

Kirk broke away. "Where do you want to finish this?" he gasped out in eager impatience.

"What did you have in mind?" Spock wondered in happy anticipation.

Kirk was relieved to see not a trace of flushed green on the handsome face. However, the memory of what he'd done earlier had him rethinking the next step. "For starters, a jump in the lake. I'd li...a...it's been hot today," he finished lamely.

Spock knew instantly why Kirk wanted to wash off and, with effort, managed to keep from giving himself away. He agreed and taking the proffered hand, let Kirk lead him to the lake.

The water was as cold as the Vulcan remembered it, but Kirk, being so delirious with the freedom to finally look and touch, was oblivious to the temperature. Oddly, he was concentrating so hard on the joy of washing Spock that he was only vaguely aware of the fact that Spock was washing him.

Kirk had Spock cleaned and rinsed in record time. Not only was he eager to get back to his bed, but he didn't need the extra stimulation at the moment. Besides, there would be other baths to linger through. But he made the mistake of keeping his hands on Spock while the Vulcan completed his job.

With his eyes following his hands, Kirk cupped smooth shoulders, slid down leanly muscled, lightly haired arms to linger on hip bones. Then fingers were threaded through short, thickly curled hair, which the reflection of the water kept from his sight. And despite the cold, he found Spock still respectably hard when he slid his hands around the long shaft.

With Spock's hands still occupied in washing/caressing Kirk's chilled ass, the captain took both their cocks in his hand and pulled them upward together. Once they'd been settled between their bodies, he stepped closer to hold them there. Then his questing hands moved around to the Vulcan's taut cheeks, feeling the muscles twitch in his palms as he squeezed the compelling flesh. His fingers slid across the skin, being drawn down and into the warm crease while his mouth took possession of one small, olive tinted nipple.

His mind was so filled with the unbelievable sensations of fondling Spock that he was becoming desperate to turn him around and shove his aching cock into him.

Just the thought of being inside you.... Oh shit! His hands gripped the Vulcan's quivering flesh and his eyes closed on a groan of pleased agony as he fought in vain to hold back the first contraction.

The sound released Spock from his own trance and, not knowing that he had already given his human more pleasure than he'd ever known, he picked Kirk up and carried him out of the water and back to camp.

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It was sunset and they were still in the sack. Literally, as they'd put their sleeping rolls together to make one big one. They had talked and napped and loved most of the day away.

Kirk raised up onto one arm to look at his lover then, leaning down, ran his lips over the smooth cheek and with his tongue outlined the pointed ear. "You're a beautiful lover, Mr. Spock," he whispered into that ear. "If I'd had any idea, I'd have busted my ass getting you into my bed years ago. No...maybe not." Lowering his forehead to Spock's chest, he admitted, "I'd have been just as scared then as I was now."

"Scared, Jim? Of what?"

"Of losing you."

Spock's arm tightened around him. *So, that fear has also been yours. How could our instincts have failed us so completely? And why could they not have continued to do so?*

Kirk lifted his head and grinned. "Surely you don't think I hadn't said anything because I was afraid of losing my virginity?"

Spock's eyes closed and he flushed to the delicate points of his ears.

"Now don't go all green on me," Kirk teased. "It's a little late for embarrassment. Are you forgetting which one of us was doing the begging?" he asked as he settled back down onto Spock's shoulder.

The Vulcan managed a weak "No", grateful that no other answer was expected, otherwise he'd have had to confess that he'd been silently begging long before Kirk had voiced that same need.

"Uh...Spock, would I have had to work very hard to get you into bed with me?"

Spock was quiet, thinking that over. "I cannot say, Jim. I do not know how to answer that. At the time I...."

"That's okay," Kirk interrupted by patting the concave abdomen. "It was a dumb question anyway. Besides, I think I understand now." Kirk smiled when the black head turned and brows questioned. "You had to accept yourself first," he answered. "Then there'd be room for me."

"Yes." Spock was surprised, mildly astonished at Kirk's insight. *And yet I should not be. No one has ever understood me the way you do.*

He hugged his lover to him and lifted his eyes to gaze up at the few stars that were already visible, absently fixing their position in his memory, while Kirk's hand was lightly sliding over him, caressing from chest to groin. The loving touches might have received their reward, but Kirk unknowingly shifted the Vulcan's attention.

"That's why you left me. I mean...it was me you left, wasn't it? Not the service?"

Spock's eyes remained on the pink and purple colors of the darkening sky. "Yes."

Kirk's fingers were now back to the ear so unlike his own. He couldn't seem to stop touching them. Or him. "Why? Even if you couldn't tell me, why couldn't you stay?"

Spock settled his cheek more firmly against the loving hand. "I had to leave, Jim. I could not allow you to come any closer, yet I could not keep you away. I had to get away from emotions I felt could not be allowed to exist if I was to remain what I was. But I failed before I had even begun, because when I left, I did not know that I would take you with me."

The words healed Kirk's leftover wounds, yet made a new one. "Then why did you come back more than a stranger? Were you angry with me for making you fail? For making you go in the first place?"

Spock didn't miss the hurt in the soft voice and hugged Kirk to him. "I believed it necessary to keep the detachment I had worked so hard to achieve." Spock took a moment before finishing this difficult confession. "You were the one thing which prevented me from becoming what I thought I wanted most. And there were times when I found myself in the position of...resenting you." Spock turned his head away.

Kirk was silent for a moment before making his own confession. "I guess that makes us even."

"Even?" The elegant head turned back.

"I had my time of...hating you, too. When you left, I didn't understand your actions or why I was so hurt by them. I felt...I was so afraid I'd never see you again." Pain surfaced in his voice. "I had to find some way of coping with that." Then, after a moment, "I've been a trial for you, haven't I?" -

"Not a trial, Jim. A lesson. A most difficult one, yet the most beautiful." Spock rolled toward him then, needing to hold and Kirk went into the strong arms, needing to be held.

What I put you through. I gave you something you couldn't understand and hadn't wanted, Kirk thought.

Spock lifted his head and held Kirk away from him. "Tell me," he coaxed, feeling the shyness from his companion.

"I didn't know. None of us did. We couldn't see how you could be happy all boxed in like that. After I got to know you and learned that that box wasn't sealed, I realized that I didn't want you to be any different than you were. But that made it even harder for me because I was already in pretty deep. I couldn't stop my feelings, so I wrapped them in friendship, knowing you wouldn't, couldn't accept anything more."

"I wanted to, Jim. But I feared I would lose myself."

"Surely you don't feel that way now?" Kirk quickly asked.
"Do you consider yourself to have failed because of this?"

"No, to both. V'jer showed me what true non-emotion means. Even my father is not that sterile of emotion and he is of pure Vulcan blood." Spock ran a finger down Kirk's nose and across lips that softly parted. "How have you taken this...emotion from me when I could not give it to any other?"

Kirk smiled and kissed the finger, knowing that Spock really didn't know. "That's love, my love," he laughed gently. "The most powerful force in existence, and it will defeat even your attempts to make sense of it. Not only is it notoriously blind, but it defies all logic." He suddenly needed to kiss Spock so badly he was shaking with it. "I love you, my Vulcan. So very much."

Spock moved the inch to complete the kiss he wanted with an equal intensity. With his body wrapped around this man he loved beyond life itself, he felt himself on the verge of being overwhelmed by his emotions. And so dangerously close to surging into the mind he knew would accept not only his touch, but the Matebond.

And that is the one thing I cannot do. Yet it is the one thing I want, crave even more than your body.

In silent desperation, he pulled Kirk under him and tried to assuage his need for mindlove by gifting his love with everything that was his to give.

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"I want to go back," Kirk said as they neared their campsite. "And at the same time, I just want to stay here with you."

It was their last day on shore leave and they'd spent it walking, wandering around the meadow, climbing a hill or two, stopping here and there, sharing a kiss, a caress. Nothing more, just content for the moment being together. But evening was nearing and the slow, loving day had Kirk more than ready to climb in between the cool sleeping rolls with his warm Vulcan.

"I wonder how long it'll be before they all know?" Kirk spoke the thought that had just come to him.

Spock flinched at the words. Here it was. The moment he'd been waiting for. Humanly dreading, humanly delaying.

"There will be nothing for them to know."

The captain didn't seem to hear. "I suppose if we were very careful we could keep us a secret. But you know as well as I do that keeping a secret on that ship is nothing short of a miracle. And you don't believe in those," he teased.

"Considering what has occurred between us, perhaps I shall have to reconsider that particular possibility." Spock's words were true, but they were more to give him time to think as he frantically worded, then reworded what he

couldn't say. What he had to say.

Oblivious to Spock's turmoil, Kirk chattered on. "For myself, I don't care who knows about us. I really don't. I love you and I'm not going to hide it. But I'm not so sure that being open about our relationship would be good for you. Would it?" he asked, glancing sideways at the quiet male beside him.

Spock's hand tightened around Kirk's. "It would be dishonest and demeaning to our feelings to be secretive about them, as though we were ashamed of the way we felt for each other. However, the question does not arise. Jim...", his voice lowered and cracked. "We...cannot be. This cannot be."

Kirk dropped Spock's hand as if it suddenly burned him and stared up at the suddenly unreadable face. "What? Why?"

The next words were so quietly said, Kirk almost didn't hear them. "Your career could be jeopardized. And your command. Your position as captain forbids it." Spock's throat threatened to close on him. He swallowed and managed to regain partial control. "Especially with your second in command. It would not be allowed even if I were female. Starfleet would have me transferred. Immediately."

"No!" Kirk cried out. "I won't be without you again."

A long finger ran the length of Kirk's jaw down to his chin. "I know, T'hy'la. But what of the ship? You would be placed in a position where, eventually, you would have to choose between us. She is everything to you. You were born to command her. I am honored to share even that much of your life."

Kirk's eyes had widened. "Do you really believe that?"

"You need only to remember your time without her and your command to know I speak the truth."

Oh, I remember all right, Kirk thought with a mild anger. I'll never forget. But you were also missing from my life during those long, lonely years. I lost you both at the same time. And to this day, I can't say which moment gave me the greater joy; boarding her, knowing I was taking command, or when you stepped out of the lift.

Hazel eyes, sad and wistful, had drifted downward and were resting on the Vulcan's hands. He took one, enfolding it tightly and they continued on to their camp.

"I'm not so sure that's true anymore. Anyway, it's too late now. We can't go back," Kirk said with happy conviction. "We're lovers and I'm going to keep you."

Spock kept his eyes forward and on the trail. He didn't have complete control over his feelings at the moment and he couldn't trust that his eyes wouldn't give him away. If Kirk knew how badly he too wanted to keep this.... He didn't doubt that his lover would give up his command to stay with him, but he knew that without it and his ship, part of Kirk would slowly die. And when he eventually, inevitably returned to the Admiralty -- yes, they could conceivably have a...marriage then. If he wanted to put Kirk's career in the hands of

more powerful men who might not approve of such commitments.

Spock knew what his friend had already experienced, being without his ship and his stars. His instinct to protect was extremely strong. "There is a way to forget what we have known."

Kirk cringed at the quiet words. "I can't believe you're saying this. Why?"

"I will not allow you to put your command in jeopardy for me. For this. As...wonderful as it is. The physical part is all that need be forgotten. We will still have the other. Nothing and no one will ever touch that."

Even with those words, which Kirk hadn't needed, it seemed that Spock's logic had never been so cruel. Walking, but not seeing where he was going, he quietly asked how he could be made to forget.

"I can erase the memories." But to himself, Spock didn't try to minimize the extreme effort it would take to empty his own mind of the time they'd shared.

"I'd forgotten you could do that." Kirk was suddenly afraid to look at him. Afraid that he'd see cool, calm control where for days there had been loving softness and quiet laughter. So he missed the sadness that Spock couldn't keep from his dark eyes.

They reached camp and the first thing Kirk saw was their bed. "Do you want to forget?" he whispered.

Spock swallowed. "You will. Once you are back on the ship, feel her under you again and are once more in command." Hoping to distract Kirk from the fact that he hadn't answered his question, Spock let go of his hand and, quickly undressing, slipped in between the covers. Holding back the top, he silently invited his lover to join him.

His ploy worked and Kirk quickly stripped and crawled in beside him, feeling, rather than hearing, the hiss of breath when his cooler body touched the warmer one.

"I don't plan on this being the last time. And I'm not going to let you end this in the morning or the minute we're on board." Kirk could almost feel the words as they were having to be forced through a suddenly tight throat.

Spock knew when argument ceased to be effective. The captain would understand once they were back to reality. Though, right now, this was the only reality he wanted. Pulling Kirk closer to him, Spock opened his mouth for him. His leg moved over Kirk's to enfold him even more and his hand curved around the still cold cheek of Kirk's buttock, pulling him that last bit closer.

Kirk's tongue slid into the Vulcan's mouth where it touched and teased, slowly drawing Spock's tongue back to him where he could suck on it, pulling, squeezing, sliding over it as he'd so often done to Spock's very willing cock. He'd never understand how he could want them both with almost equal hunger.

He wanted them both now and tried to reach between their bodies, but Spock had his arms effectively pinned. So he began moving his hips instead, hoping

the strong arms would release him.

Slowly, as if he was trying to reposition Spock's hardening cock with his own, he squirmed back and forth, up and down, in circles, pushing, rubbing, bone against bone, skin against skin. And the effect was faster and more dramatic than he'd expected.

Though Spock couldn't say for sure that this would be the last time, it was close enough to it and he wanted Jim with a passionate need that brought a burning ache to his groin.

And the human's mind was as passionately desired, wanted. His hand was positioned on Kirk's face before he realized he'd even moved. With a moan, fearing the breaking of the last thread of control should their minds join, he changed the meld touch into a caress and slid his hand into the silky bronze hair and, as if he were attempting to pull Kirk into his body, thrust his tongue deeper into the loving mouth.

Kirk had one hand free now and, while his mind sank into the delirious joy of the Vulcan's possession, that hand was reaching for the tube of sunscreen that was never far away -- it had proved to be a most successful lubricant. But when he tried to put it on Spock he was stopped. Without a word, Spock pulled back just far enough to take the tube away from him and by the time he'd covered every well-known and much-loved inch of Kirk's rosy pink shaft, it had filled even more, the skin stretching into an impressive erection. He thoroughly enjoyed not only the feel of Kirk becoming hard and slippery in his sensitive hand, but hearing the soft moans and the pleading words to hurry.

The big hand lowered to the waiting testicles and found them rigid with tightness. Spock let his finger drift even farther back, finding, touching, teasing, entering to the first joint, then pulling away. At another incoherent pleading groan, he took Kirk's hand and covered the palm with the excess cream and then curled it around his own hot shaft. The pressure was nearly his undoing.

"Jim, not so hard. I am too close now."

"Then give me something else to do," the Vulcan was instructed between kisses.

The long leg moved higher onto Kirk's hip and with a small twist, and a little help from his partner, all was in position. Feeling his cockhead pressing against the tight opening, Kirk pushed his hips forward and entered Spock as slowly as he could, trying to make this first sheathing last. But halfway in, he couldn't stop the need to thrust the rest of the way and he was back out and in on a second, then a third stroke before Spock could stop him.

"Slowly, Jim," Spock begged. "Please, very slowly."

"I thought you wanted this fast and hard? That's the impression I got."

"I have changed my mind. In fact, do not move at all." Spock's blood was pounding in his ears and he could feel the veins in his cock pulsing with each heartbeat.

Kirk's lungs were being filled by short gasping breaths, and each one pulled more of Spock's heated scent into his mind. He groaned with excited frustration. Just lying there, not moving in and out, was torture, so he put all the concentration he could into what was in his hand.

Sliding his fingers down the hot, stiff cock, he reached below to fill his palm with the tenderest part of his lover. His fingers kept on going, moving, stretching farther back until they slid over Spock's anus and around his own cock. But feeling their bodies together like that, touching with his fingers where they were joined, was suddenly not a good idea. A whimper escaped and quickly, but reluctantly, he pulled back to hopefully safer regions.

There was no way Spock couldn't have felt the soft touch and it brought the air rushing out of his lungs as he gripped Kirk's head and hungrily took his mouth. When Kirk trailed his hand back up the long, satiny smooth shaft, Spock trembled and his arms tightened even more, holding his lover so close he couldn't move anything but his fingers.

Spock threw his head back and gasped for air as those fingers pressed and molded the sculptured head. Then one fingertip gently separated the tiny slit on the very top and at the same time, Kirk slowly moved his hips, drawing his cock out to its sensitized head, then back in till it could go no further. Every muscle in Spock's body clenched and, shuddering with a groan of exquisite pain, his body took command and released the building pressure into the hand still holding him. Kirk was only seconds away when the muscles he was encased in began squeezing him.

Even when it became easier to breathe, Kirk still didn't move, preferring to let gravity take care of separating them. Spock was more than content to stay where he was, especially since he couldn't move anyway. His release had been total and every muscle seemed unwilling to do his bidding. But no matter how much they wanted to stay as they were, eventually there was no choice and, when gravity had once again proven true, a different kind of hunger began to make itself known. Spock knew that if he was ready to eat, the man in his arms had to be famished, since it was not only dinner time, but after sex.

"It is a good thing you brought as many towels as you did," Spock said, deciding to get his love moving in that direction.

"I didn't want to chance not having a dry one when I needed it. I should have brought more." Kirk lengthened his muscles into a welcome stretch. "I am starving!" He grinned. "You seem to have an astounding effect on all my appetites, Commander."

Spock chuckled at the announcement and moved to grab the already wet towel lying near them.

"I'll do that," Kirk intervened. "I like washing you."

"I like being washed. One of the many unexpected pleasures you have shown me."

The cloth stilled over the softened cock. "Spock...?" The hazel eyes finished saying what he couldn't.

"It will be all right, Jim. We will be all right. Please, do not be sad." The thought came that he would do well to heed his own words.

Kirk could only nod and finish his cleaning. Then Spock took the towel and went over him. It was too cold now to go without clothes, so they dressed before rebuilding the fire and getting dinner, which was smoothly and efficiently done. Afterward, they packed for the morning, took their nightly walk, set the sonic protector and, stripping, got back into bed. Spock lay on his back, giving Kirk the freedom to lay his arm and leg over him in the position they'd slept in since that first night. Kirk was as close as he could get and not be on top of him.

Touching him, Spock could feel Kirk's inner restlessness. He rubbed his cheek on the soft head. "Sleep," he gently ordered.

And, surprisingly, he was obeyed.

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The next morning they returned to the ship and it was as Kirk had known it would be. Giving her up again would be hard, a difficult thing to do. But if he had to choose between them, there was no doubt as to which one it would be.

The trouble is, Spock knows it too. But that damn stubborn nature of his won't let him see that I need him more.

Still, he wasn't giving up without a fight. He asked for "...just a few more days".

Spock attempted to tell him that the longer they continued, the harder it would be to end, but the eyes he loved so much were tearing him apart. *Time, I need time to do what must be done.*

The captain got his few more days.

Their nights were spent in each other's arms, their days within each other's sight, but that didn't stop Kirk from falling into a depression over the week Spock had given them, during the course of which the Vulcan continued to try to convince him there was no other way. Kirk continued to fail in his efforts to convince Spock that there was. And in this battle of wills, Kirk knew he couldn't even count on a stalemate; he was going to lose.

Even the new uniforms, which were more comfortable and looked terrific on everybody, couldn't keep his spirits even mildly elevated. Just looking at Spock in it was enough to make him want to cry. *Why does he have to look so absolutely gorgeous in that color? I thought I'd always 'see' him in blue.* The knowledge that his Vulcan was beautiful in anything he chose to wear was not much of a comfort.

Slowly, Kirk became more quiet and withdrawn. Though he was fairly successful in hiding his turmoil from the crew, there was, of course, always that one exception.

Kirk eyed the full glass sitting on McCoy's desk when he stepped into the

doctor's office at the end of his duty shift. The request for his presence had been nothing more than a politely worded order, which he'd obeyed, knowing he'd had no choice.

"Close the door and sit down," McCoy instructed. "We're going to talk. If it takes all night, you're going to tell me what the hell's going on."

Kirk didn't sit down, but he picked up the glass and slid the contents down his throat. More for something to do than because he wanted it. "What do you mean?" he asked cautiously.

"What do I mean? Spock's acting strange as hell and you're showing all the signs of depression." *Which has completely negated any hope I've had that the shore leave had been successful.*

Kirk set the glass down, carefully avoiding the blue eyes. "It's private, Bones. We'll handle it." He hoped his voice sounded stronger than it felt.

"It's obvious that you're not 'handling it'. Either of you. When I asked Spock if he knew what was wrong with you, he gave me that look, and oh, so politely told me it was none of my concern. Then he stalked off. This from the man who practically carries you down to me when you refuse to get your ass to Sickbay. You're irritable, depressed, moody...if you were a woman at least I'd know what was wrong with you," McCoy grumbled.

"I'm sorry, Bones, but this really is none of your business." Kirk spoke quietly, trying not to hurt his friend. He turned to leave, but hadn't taken a step before he was frozen by the sound of a glass being slammed down.

"When a Starship captain and his first officer are at definite odds, it becomes not only the concern of the CMO but his duty to find out what's wrong and get it fixed." McCoy took a breath to continue, but when he did, his tone had softened. "Damnit, Jim, this is you and Spock. And I don't mind telling you I'm worried."

He could tell the man spouting rules and regulations to stuff it, but not the one with so much concern in his voice. Kirk turned back to face his friend, his feelings no longer hidden. The piercing blue eyes were instantly narrowed in concentration.

"I'm going to lose him, Bones. And I don't know what to do." Feeling a bit dizzy, Kirk quickly sat down.

"My gods, I thought this was just a tiff that had gotten out of hand and you needed a push in the right direction. From the beginning," he encouraged, refilling the empty glasses.

Kirk drained his, this time needing the stimulant to help keep his feelings in control while he told what had happened to them. The doctor remained silent throughout the entire story. When Kirk finished, he looked up and saw his friend leaning back in his chair, nodding his head and grinning in satisfaction.

"I hope you're not disappointed that you haven't shocked me. I've been waiting for this for years. What the hell took you so long?" He chuckled at

the widening of the captain's eyes. "This is the best thing that's ever happened to either of you."

Kirk visibly relaxed. *I can't believe I was worried about telling him.* "I know it is. But I can't convince him. He's got this idea of what he thinks I need and he's determined to see I don't lose it. I've talked, cajoled...loved, damn near pleaded... 'til I'm breathless and he's still adamant."

The doctor was no longer smiling. "I'm sorry, Jim. Damn sorry."

"You know that stubborn mind of his as well as I do, and it's set." Kirk sighed. "Anyway, once it's done, I won't remember any of this. Neither will he. But, right now, it's damn hard."

McCoy was silent, trying to think of something, anything.

"Time's up tonight. I don't know how I'm going to be able to let him do it." The voice cracked on the last word and McCoy's heart went out to him. To both of them.

Kirk pushed his chair back and stood up, moving like a very tired man. "Thanks, Bones."

The doctor nodded and watched him leave. He finished his neglected brandy, though he wondered why he bothered with it. It never numbed the nerves it was supposed to. Out of reflex, he started to pour another, then stopped and set the decanter down.

I am not going to sit here and get drunk. Damnit, I have to try. Even if it means getting the set down of my life.

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"Jim, the risk of our being separated is enormous. Neither of us wants that and I will not accept the sacrifice of your command for the sake of...." Spock faltered. Kirk didn't.

"Love, Spock. The word is love." Seeing the set face, the tightness around the slim mouth, he knew it really was no use. "Will you do it now?"

"We will need a few minutes to prepare. At the moment, you are not completely receptive to me."

Kirk couldn't help the curving of his lips. "Your understatements are classics." Then, tilting his head, he widened his lips into the smile he knew Spock had trouble resisting and quietly asked, "Will you let me love you once more?" Not only to postpone this just an hour or two longer, but because he wanted it so much. The memory would be.... *Oh, gods...*, he silently groaned.

"Jim....," Spock pleaded, his voice tight, nearly strangling with emotion. This was going to be even more difficult than he'd thought. He did not need the added complication of having to cope with aroused bodies and the afterglow of being so perfectly loved.

"McCoy to Spock."

Kirk's head swiveled at the voice coming from the intercom. His heart skipped a beat and his stomach tightened. He wasn't aware that Spock had moved until the Vulcan was at the desk answering the summons.

"I want to see you in my quarters, Mr. Spock. Right now," the CMO ordered.

"That will not be possible, Doctor. I am...."

"NOW!" The closing of the channel was audible.

Spock turned to Kirk with a lifted eyebrow. "I must assume it is urgent for him to take that tone with me. I shall return as soon as possible."

"I...guess I'll take a shower. Maybe it'll help me relax." He knew nothing was going to do that, but it would be something to do while he waited. Spock nodded and left, mentally warning the doctor that this had better be necessary.

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McCoy looked Spock over as carefully as if the Vulcan was on the diagnostic table. The strain was evident. *But am I in time?*

Whether he was or not, he opened his mouth and threw the first accusation "You're really gonna do it, aren't you? Just erase it all and forget it ever happened."

The dark eyes narrowed. "Explain yourself."

"How can you do it, Spock? Damn it! Don't you understand?"

"Just what is it that I am supposed to understand?" Spock was surprised that he'd asked that instead of just leaving.

McCoy was fully aware of what he was about to say and who he was about to say it to, but not even the cold Vulcan mask that told him he was indeed in time and about to cross the line was going to stop him. He took a deep breath and plunged in.

"What you and Jim have found together is so rare, Spock. Those few who are lucky enough to find it, and recognize it, do everything within their power not to let it go. And here you are -- willing to forget it."

"'It'?" Spock asked, not fully comprehending why he did.

"Love, Spock. Pure, true, selfless, undeniable, unending love."

The description was perfect and Spock wasn't really surprised that he had known. Though if he'd thought to ask how long the doctor had known, that would have shocked him. Out of habit, the words came forth. "I am a Vulcan, Doctor, incapable of experiencing...."

"BULLSHIT!" There was no question as to McCoy's own feelings on that particular subject. "You had me believing that in the beginning, but I finally saw through you. It just took me a while longer than it did Jim."

The dark eyes widened and brows shot into black bangs. "Are you saying that you approve of such a relationship between a Starship ca....." Spock halted, swallowed. "...between us? Even in the face of Starfleet's policy concerning command relationships?"

"You're damn right I do." McCoy clamped his jaw tight, holding the grin of elation that wanted to get out. Not only had Spock not walked out on him, but he hadn't even told him to stay out of his private affairs. *Or shoved me through the nearest wall.*

"Do you realize what the consequences could be?" Spock demanded, already knowing McCoy knew every one of them.

"Of course I do," the doctor confirmed. "But there isn't a one, not one that either of you couldn't live with. They don't mean a thing."

"Jim's having to give up his command because of me? His having to endure the looks and remarks of those who would not approve of a male, and an Admiral at that, in a homosexual relationship? The possible ruination of his career because of that fact? Those are things that we could live with?"

"A damn sight easier than he could live without you. Or you him. Damnit, Spock, you just can't casually forget about this."

"There is nothing casual about this decision, Doctor." Spock's voice may have been controlled, but that control wasn't total and his eyes told McCoy how badly he was hurting.

"Spock, I'm your friend, too. Your happiness is as important to me as Jim's. Because of your ability to take away memories, it's possible for you to continue as you always have without endangering your close bond of friendship. But memories notwithstanding, there is a need in both of you that will always be there. I came to the conclusion a long time ago that you're the only one who would be able to fill that need for Jim. As for you?" He smiled. "No, I don't think I have to tell you what he means to you."

Those last words had the opposite effect than the one the doctor had been aiming for. Spock's resolve hardened. "It is precisely Jim's need with which I am concerned. His need to command a Starship. That is of unquestionable priority. I will do nothing to jeopardize that position."

McCoy stared at him, then slowly shook his head in exasperation. "And you have the balls to say you know nothing about love?"

For the first time since he'd entered the room Spock's eyes lowered and McCoy dared to hope he was getting through. "You're selling Jim short, Spock. Underestimating him. Something you've never done before. You actually believe his career, his command mean more to him than you do? Don't you?" He insisted on an answer.

"Doctor...Leonard....," Spock was almost pleading for mercy. "You do not

understand, cannot compre...."

"Oh, yes I do! If ever two people belonged together, it's you and Jim. To hell with the rules and those who wouldn't approve can go fuck themselves. Go to him, Spock. Don't lose each other because of a noble but extremely misguided sense of what you think is right for him. You're what's right for him. You're one of the greatest believers in truth I've ever seen, Spock. Well, believe this; Jim is your truth. Just as you are his." Besides, if I know 'human' nature at all, this would only happen all over again. Love will out, everytime.

While he was saying this, he was carefully guiding the now dazed Vulcan to the door. Everything had been said. He could do nothing more. The door slid closed.

"I don't give a damn if I never win another argument with you for as long as I live. Just let me win this one," McCoy pleaded in the silent room.

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Spock was halfway to his quarters before he became aware of his surroundings. Feeling his logically built resolve begin to shake with doubts, he stopped walking and used the wall at his shoulder for support.

I have been so careful to reach the decision that was best for Jim. Not what I wanted. And what he wanted.... He groaned at the memories. No! Stop! I cannot think of that...Jim's command is everything to him.

'You actually believe his career, his command mean more to him than you do?' McCoy's words echoed in his mind.

But neither of us could bear to be separated if we were discovered and I cannot bear the thought of his giving up his command because of me...to watch him die a little each day. And perhaps coming to hate me because of it. But to have him. To love him, to touch, to feel his cool body close to mine...inside of me. To forever join him in passion. The mindlove.... No, I must think of him, I cannot be selfish. The slender shoulders slumped in despair.

'You're his truth, Just as he is yours.' The too-true words haunted his thoughts.

"Jim...." Spock's whispered groan brought him out of his thoughts. He straightened up, quickly looked around and was relieved to find himself alone.

When he entered his cabin, Kirk was waiting for him, the hazel eyes glazed with pain. Spock wavered. Never in his life had he had a more difficult decision to make and, truly not wanting to prolong the agony, but needing more time, he told Kirk he'd only be a short while longer and headed for his bathroom.

Needing to feel the water pounding against his skin, Spock stepped into the steaming stream. He bathed, and soon found himself beginning to tremble as his shaking hands spread the soap over his body. And when they covered his genitals, his mind replaced them with Kirk's cool, gentle touch.

A groan of agony had him quickly rinsing, then wrenching off the water. He quit the stall and grabbed a towel. Barely dry, he wrapped his black robe around his damp body, tied the belt then, taking a deep, controlling breath, returned to the man in the other room.

Kirk had nearly gone crazy waiting for him to come back from seeing McCoy and by the time Spock came out of the bathroom, he was visibly shaking.

"I...oh, Spock, to lose you now...", his throat stopped working and Spock reached out and touched his face.

Kirk leaned his cheek into the warm hand and Spock gently ran his thumb across the full lips. "You will not lose me, T'hy'la, for I shall always belong to you." The words, spoken in loving gentleness, cut through the human and he quickly swung around to hide his eyes and his quivering mouth.

For a long minute, Spock stared at the back of Kirk's head, trying to think of a way to make this easier. But McCoy's words were demanding to be heard again. A litany he couldn't ignore.

'You actually believe...career, command mean more to him than you do? It's so rare...believe in truth...you are his...he is yours...believe, Spock. So rare...believe...yours...his...believe....'

As if in a trance, Spock turned Kirk back around and placed gentle fingers on his face, the silent request evident by their placement. Kirk's throat closed completely, but before he lost all control, he closed his eyes and nodded. The first touch was gentle, then he felt the Vulcan's desperation. Or was it his own?

This meld was different than the others they'd shared, but Kirk couldn't have said what it was that made it so.

Tell me again..., the silent demand bored into Kirk's mind, that you could willingly relinquish your command, put even your career at risk, and that you would not, for one, single second, regret that decision.

Kirk was stunned, so much so that he had to grab hold of Spock's arms to steady himself. He'd expected.... His answer was instantaneous and crystal clear.

You're worth that price. And more.

Spock heard and saw...and believed. Kirk's mind was suddenly flooded with emotion and he nearly cried out as the impact of Spock's feelings hit him.

When his mind was released, he fell into Spock's arms, his mouth already reaching for him. But it was stopped by a strong hand on his jaw and, when he looked up, he saw Spock's eyes, nearly black with an emotion he couldn't read. The large hand gripped Kirk's jaw and, with his other arm, the Vulcan pulled him so close he could hardly breathe, clutching him to the point of pain.

"Let us trust that you will never have to pay it." The words were a harsh whisper of desperation, but they seemed to release something inside of Spock and

the hand on Kirk's jaw moved to the back of his head, holding him close, as if the restraining hand was necessary.

"That I could be worth your command...," Spock whispered incredulously as he lowered his head.

Kirk's mouth opened to angrily protest, but Spock was filling it with his tongue and Kirk instantly changed his tactics. He was more than happy to convince his love with actions instead of words.

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When Kirk woke up, the first thing he did was to check the time. Smiling, he returned to his place on Spock's shoulder. They had four hours until their duty shift.

Kirk twisted until his lips could reach the soft earlobe and, after kissing it, whispered a loving command. "Wake up so I can be with you."

Spock's eyes opened instantly and, with a smile, they went into each other's arms. After a minute, they snuggled back down under the covers, though Kirk stayed on top of the warm body, his elbows supporting him as he gazed down at a sight he ^{had} thought would always be just a dream; being in Spock's bed, with a thoroughly loved Vulcan smiling up at him, both lover and loved.

"How come you didn't believe me before?" Kirk had wanted to ask that last night, but it had gotten lost somewhere between the thought and Spock's bed.

Spock pulled his lover down to him and began his apology with a long, delicious kiss. "I must ask for your understanding. I had no experience to guide me and your mind is very strong. I was afraid to believe, afraid I was wanting it too much to hear what you were really saying."

"What made you believe me this time?"

"The words of a friend."

Bless you, Bones!

Kirk sat up, straddling him, and poked him in the chest. "That's great. You'd believe him, but not me? I'm not so sure I want to gain a lover at the expense of my best friend."

Spock gripped the strong arms and, rolling Kirk over, pinned him down with his body. "I know you are teasing, but I shall answer you anyway. You are my best friend and my lover, my life, the keeper of my soul. And I want you to know that I would bond us this minute, only...."

"Yes, I want that, too," Kirk's arms tightened around him, pulling him closer. "I think I've always wanted it. To belong to you forever in that way."

Spock's eyes flickered. "No, Jim. We cannot share that bond." He

wouldn't have believed how much it would hurt to actually say it.
"But you must know that I want it as much as you."

"Why then?" he cried out as he pushed Spock away and fell back onto his pillow.

Spock settled onto his knees, still straddling Kirk's legs. "You have forgotten that, should I die, there would be no one to pull your mind back from the death link. I will not let that happen to you. It would be as if I were killing you myself."

Kirk remembered back several years to when Sarek had nearly lost Amanda. Through judicious questioning, Spock had finally explained what would have happened had he not been there to help his father keep Amanda alive. But there was more.

"That wouldn't be one sided. You know damn well that if I died you wouldn't let go. You've already proven that. Several times in fact." Kirk shuddered at memories which could never be forgotten. So many times when he'd been seriously injured, yet kept alive only by the Vulcan's being in his mind, using his strength to keep the human alive until McCoy could take over. But one time had nearly become the last time. Kirk had felt the Vulcan's mind as it had followed him deeper into unconsciousness. He knew he was dying and he'd also known that Spock would stay with him, trying to keep him alive, until it was too late to retreat. In a last desperate surge of strength, Kirk had managed to sever the link, throwing Spock's mind away from him before they both sank into the dark oblivion.

Kirk had in fact died. For twenty-five horrifying seconds, Spock had been frantic to re-establish the meld, but McCoy and his team had suddenly appeared and, in minutes, all was well again.

Spock had come so close to dying with me that time....

It hit him then and a sharp gasp pierced Kirk's lungs. If there had been any question before, a full bonding between them would now make Spock's death a certainty.

For the first time, Spock was unaware of his lover's expression. "Yes, that is true. But I will not be the instrument of your death."

Only second before, Kirk would have argued those words, tone of voice or not, but he was so shaken by the thought of what a bond of that strength between them would mean to the Vulcan's life, that all he could do was whisper, "And I would be yours, wouldn't I?"

The dark eyes widened, then lowered and Spock was silent for so long that Kirk finally repeated his words. "Wouldn't I?" He reached up to shake the Vulcan to make him answer.

"Yes," Spock admitted. "You would also be mine. But that is my choice. It is my choice without the bond and has always been so. The difference is that because of the bond, there would be no choice for you."

Spock's words broke Kirk's shock of knowing that a full bonding would truly

be a double edged sword. *I understand, Spock, I really do. Now you need to understand, too.* "There's always suicide."

"NO!" Spock screamed out in protest. He grabbed Kirk's arms and held on tightly, neither of them aware of how much strength he was using. "You will not do that. You will live because I want it so. Promise me. PROMISE!"

Kirk's eyes fell before the unshielded terror in the dark eyes. He had only attempted to make Spock see that either way, it would be his choice. Whether or not he could actually do it was beside the point. What was the point here was that it didn't matter to him where they were together, just as long as they were together. He knew that as surely as he knew his own name.

He also knew that he had to promise. The anguish on Spock's face had to be eradicated. Knowing Spock couldn't see his fingers which were still wrapped around the Vulcan's arms, he crossed them, childishly keeping his options open, and looked straight into the pleading brown eyes. "No, Spock. I won't do that. I promise."

Spock all but collapsed into his arms. "Jim, please, do not ever...."

"I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to do that to you. I was only trying to get you to see that there was another way for me to be with you."

It would take time, but Kirk knew in his mind that eventually he'd make his stubborn, tenacious, wonderful Vulcan understand precisely just how much he didn't want to be without him. Anywhere.

Spock tried to ease Kirk's disappointment at the impracticality of the bond, though he couldn't have said just who his words were for, because he desperately needed to share even a small portion of the human's mind in a link of any strength. "There is one other bond. However, without the Priestess, I do not know how strong I can make it, or if I can establish it at all."

The bright eyes lit up and Kirk quoted, "More than a betrothal, but less than a marriage."

Spock smiled. "You remembered."

"I also remember the words you said that day on the bridge."

"Said without meaning," Spock qualified while he squirmed farther back in order to pull his chosen up to kneel in front of him. "If this bonding works, it will allow us a deeper awareness of each other, a true link, though we will remain more separate than with the full bonding. And it will also draw us together during my Time."

Kirk couldn't stop his complacent grin. "I figured that problem was already taken care of."

"Yes, it is," Spock happily agreed with a quiet stipulation. He would have to form a surrogate matebond before his control was lost or they'd come out of his Time fully bonded. "However, if this works, that will be assured. Jim,

I must tell you that....," he hesitated, his eyes lowering.

Leaning forward, Kirk tilted his head and peered up at him. "Come on, out with it," he coaxed.

"When my Time came again, I would not have accepted any other but you." He slowly raised his eyes and flinched when he saw the scowl forming as the real meaning of his words sank in.

But after a moment, Kirk's anger disappeared. "Do I take that to mean I just anticipated you coming to me eventually?"

Spock could tease too. "We will never know. Will we?"

"That's what you think, Vulcan," the captain stated firmly. The sound of authority made it quite clear that Spock wouldn't have had any say in the matter. The knowledge warmed the Vulcan all over.

The long fingers positioned themselves on the glowing face. "Your words please me and you fill me with so much happiness. Will you speak the words with me?"

Kirk's eyes were shining and damp and Spock didn't really need to hear the whispered "Yes". The Vulcan's voice was deep, throaty, yet clear as he spoke the beautiful words of bonding. And this time, they were said with his heart, from deep in his soul.

Kirk repeated them, his voice steady and strong, the timbre of it a most precious sound to the Vulcan's ear. Spock entered Kirk's mind then, going deep inside yet carefully staying away from the one place where he really wanted to be. The place where a moment's touch would make them irreversibly, permanently one.

...as if we are not already, and have not been from the first.... Spock thought as he forged the link of betrothal, the one that would bind them in all but the deepest parts of their minds, the one that insured Spock's life and the one that would not make Kirk's life a forfeit to love.

He used everything he knew to insure this bonding. The Priestess was usually a part of it. He was unsure if he would be able to do it without her. The doubt was gone before he'd withdrawn from Kirk's mind. He had done it. Their thread of constant awareness was now a chain, forged in love, deeply imbedded. The strongest tie yet. Broken only by the final bonding...or death.

"It's...oh, Spock," Kirk whispered, fearing to break the spell still surrounding them. Filling them.

"Beloved," Spock whispered in answer, his very being so full of emotion he was incapable of anything more. Except to take Kirk into his arms and lower them back down to the bed where they touched and kissed and caressed until they were both breathless.

Kirk squirmed under the loving mouth, especially when it had moved down to the sensitive area around his navel, dipping inside for a lick, then farther down

to his hip bones. Spock's tongue traced the line from bone to balls, stopping along the way to nip gently, sending shivers everywhere throughout Kirk's already fiercely aroused body.

When Kirk felt hot breath on his balls, he lifted his hips and Spock took the offering, sucking gently until Kirk was moaning helplessly. Fingers gripped the dark head when Spock moved to higher territory to devour the standing phallus.

Pleading words and pulling hands finally made Spock stop and reach for the tube that was nearby. They were always more than willing to end their foreplay with rubbing the cream over and into each other. Then Spock changed their positions, moving under his human and lifting his legs, offering himself to his panting lover.

An offering Kirk happily accepted. With eyes locked, Kirk positioned himself and entered. Heat flared within him at the contact with the inside of Spock's body and Kirk had to stop for a moment, he was suddenly so weak with desire and love. He absently began stroking the furry legs resting on his shoulders, trying to bring himself back to awareness and some small bit of control. Soon, he felt able to continue and he gently, but firmly, began to thrust in a slow, even cadence. And every now and then he'd caress a leg with his cheek, then bestow a loving kiss on it, enjoying the tickling of the hairs around his mouth. But never once through it all did he take his gaze away from the flushed face and half-closed eyes watching his every move.

Slowly, with every sliding movement Kirk made inside of him, Spock's expression began to change. Love to desire...desire to need...need to lust. It thrilled the hell out of him that Spock was letting him see what he was feeling instead of using the newly formed link or an outright meld. And with each change of expression, Spock's hands encouraged Kirk to thrust harder, deeper, wanting him to take more than just physical possession.

Part of Kirk wanted to close his eyes and concentrate on his throbbing penis as it slid in and out of Spock's tight ass in long, carefully controlled strokes. But there was more of him that didn't want to miss what was happening to the man under him.

Unexpectedly, Spock's hands stilled, releasing the pressure on Kirk's hips and the flame in the dark eyes began to fade. Kirk stopped all movement, wondering, waiting, watching. Then...Spock smiled. That heartstoppingly beautiful smile that even now was still so rare. The overpowering happiness on the Vulcan's face reached into the very depths of Kirk's soul and he answered it with a climax that, while it wasn't the screaming one he'd fully expected, for all its gentleness, the contractions seemed never to end. When they finally released him, he pushed the long legs off his shoulders and fell on top of the body beneath him. Only then did he realize he was crying.

Spock felt the tears as they rolled down his shoulder. He cradled Kirk, slowly rocking, trying to soothe. It was apparent that Jim was going to have to cry this out. Through their stronger link, he felt no anguish from his love. No hurt of any kind. Yet there was nothing to tell him the reason for the tears.

Still, I feel so much of him inside of me that it is difficult to believe

that this is the same bond I had shared with T'Pring. For all the difference, that link might never have been.

When Kirk showed the first signs of stopping, Spock rolled him onto his back and, grabbing a clean cloth from beside the bed, wiped Kirk's face and let him blow his nose.

"Why do you weep so? Have I done something to...?"

Kirk kissed away the concern in the dark eyes. "Oh, my love. What have you done that would make me so happy I'd cry? Only smiled at me and showed me that you were happy too." Kirk's heart was in his eyes and Spock felt his throat tighten at the words.

A smile? Why should that small gesture please him so much?

"Will I ever love you more than I do at this moment?" The words were out before it occurred to Spock that Kirk should be scolded for scaring him. But he was already too late, because he was being taken into love's embrace. And, with soft words and kisses, Love was telling him it was his turn.

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Kirk signed the report, handed it back to the ensign and glanced at the lift door for the umpteenth time, fully expecting Spock to come storming out of it.

Well, maybe not storming. Vulcan's don't storm. Exactly. His mind pictured a thoroughly annoyed, mildly enraged Vulcan male and a chuckle broke through.

Finally, Spock stepped onto the Bridge and, at the sight of him, Kirk forgot all about the reason he'd been squirming in his chair and his eyes lit up and his lips broke into a smile he couldn't keep back. He lowered his face, struggling to get it under control. When he figured he could speak without the entire Bridge crew hearing his love with every word, he looked up to find his Vulcan standing beside him.

"Good morning, Mr. Spock. You're late," he added with a knowing grin.

"My apologies, Captain. There was an urgent matter which required my attention." Spock's face was straight, but his eyes promised retaliation.

Kirk thought about what form that retaliation would most likely take and, though he didn't blush, he was beaming. That 'urgent matter' had been his fault. They had been dressed and ready to leave for the Bridge when he'd decided that Spock needed more attention than he'd gotten in the shower. Before Spock knew it, he was being attacked and before he could decide if he should stop him, it was too late.

Kirk had only moved enough material out of the way to get to him and the surprisingly fast orgasm had come before either had been ready for it, so Spock's clothes had taken it all. Kirk had then kissed the hell out of him before happily taking off for the Bridge, with his passion more than satisfied

by the Vulcan's virility. That side benefit made up for the annoying necessity of Kirk's body to have some time before it could respond again.

Kirk cleared his throat, willing his lips to straighten. "Well if you're ready, let's get started on our inspection."

"I am ready now, Captain." Spock stepped behind Kirk's chair and waited for him to go first. Watching the movement of the rounded ass, he allowed himself the pleasure of the thought of landing a solid hand on it.

When the action nearly followed, he firmly clasped his hands behind his back. But the second they were safely enclosed inside the lift, Spock pulled his unrepentant lover to him and returned the scorching kiss he'd been left with ten minutes earlier.

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Having found his private, inner office to be too small, McCoy was pacing the outer one. He couldn't sit still, let alone occupy his mind with something as mundane as medical stuff right now. He glared at the chrono; 0814. A minute later he checked it again. Two more minutes and he lit out for the Bridge. There was only so much the human nervous system could take.

He stared with wide eyes at the empty chair. *They're not here! Now, where the hell...?* "Uhura, where's Jim?"

"He and Mr. Spock are on an inspection, Doctor."

Damn! I forgot about that. "Ah...you wouldn't happen to know where they were headed first?"

Uhura frowned at him, suppressing the notion to tell him she always knew where the captain was. That was part of her job. She raised her chin a fraction. "They are in Engineering." So stating, she turned back to her station, thus missing the perfect salute he gave her before diving for the lift.

But once again he was thwarted. "'Morning, Scotty. Thought I'd find Jim here."

"He's been an' gone, Doctor."

"That couldn't have been much of an inspection," McCoy ventured a guess.

"Aye," Scotty nodded. "Ye could say it was a strange one."

"In what way?"

"The Lad hardly looked at a thing. And that's nae all. We ran the new relays for Mr. Spock, bu' if I didna know better, I'd swear he wasna payin' any attention."

McCoy kept a firm control on his rampant hopes as he casually asked, "Do

you know where they are now?"

"I think Security."

When the doctor walked into the security office, all he found was a young man sitting at his desk, shuffling a stack of computer tapes as if they were a deck of cards.

The blue eyes were shooting sparks upon seeing that his quarry had once more eluded him. "Where's the captain?" he demanded without thinking.

Plastic tapes scattered across the desk. "Geez, Doc, you scared me. You just missed him." Lieutenant Ryan quickly gathered up the tapes before inquiring of McCoy, "Doc, is something bothering the captain? Not that you'd tell me if there was," he added.

McCoy studied the man's face. "Bothering?"

"Well...the inspection, it was...odd. I mean, he was only here a few minutes, and he didn't really look at anything. But what questions he did ask, I don't think he heard my answers."

Bells started ringing. Gongs began to thunder. "He probably had something else on his mind," McCoy offered absently.

The lieutenant nodded in sympathy. "Yeah, inspections are pretty boring. I guess even for Mr. Spock."

McCoy wouldn't have left now if the floor had opened up under him. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, he just sort of stood near the door and didn't inspect anything. But you know what was really weird? He complimented me. Said I was most efficient."

"Hasn't he ever complimented you before?"

Wide, impressive shoulders were shrugged. "I guess so. I mean, it's kind of hard to tell."

"I wouldn't worry about it." McCoy was barely aware of what he was saying. "Probably more your imagination than anything else."

"Yeah," the handsome lieutenant smirked. "I've been told I have an active one. Hey, see you later, Doc," he threw at the retreating back.

McCoy managed to get to the lift without seeing where he was going. *This had better mean what I think it means or so help me I'll strangle them both.*

As he gave the order for Sickbay, an idea began forming in his own fertile mind.

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The new lovers were back on the Bridge after the fastest inspection in ENTERPRISE history. In Starfleet history if it came to that. And the only reason they were there at all was because Spock had used his considerable experience in influencing his captain and had managed to convince him that they couldn't disappear this early in the morning. However, he didn't think it necessary to inform said captain that a great deal of Vulcan willpower had been needed to accomplish it.

Uhura greeted them, then told Kirk that the doctor had been looking for him. He followed Spock to his Science station and hailed Sickbay from there.

"Bones? You there?"

"Where else would I be? I'm inviting you and Spock to lunch."

Kirk's eyes fell and met the brown ones rising up at the same time. "Ah... that's nice, Bones, but we have another...ah..."

"I'm not taking no. Both of you meet me at the forest at noon." The forest was the affectionate name given to the huge arboretum at the bottom of the ship that more than made up for the lack of natural settings in their space environment.

At Spock's nod, Kirk told the doctor they'd be there and closed the connection. Then, knowing he couldn't stay where he was for the next two hours, he reluctantly sought his chair and asked for the rest of the morning reports.

Spock's efforts to concentrate were only marginally successful. He knew it would be a while before the initial euphoria wore off, but for right now, he was going to have a time of it trying to settle down to where he could keep his mind on his work and not let it drift to the man in the center chair.

The highly sensitive Vulcan ears caught a soft chuckle from behind him and he turned to find the love of his life grinning back at him. Spock answered with an amused lifting of his black brow, but an audacious, lecherous wink sent the Vulcan back to the relative safety of his computers.

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When they entered the forest, it was to find the doctor already there, rocking back and forth on his heels, his hands clasped behind his back. He eyed them both for a moment, then demanded of Spock, "Well?"

Kirk grinned at the quickly lifted brow, not knowing that its movement was in reaction to the fact that Spock was experiencing an unexpected relief. He'd been in too much turmoil the night before to even register embarrassment at the doctor's knowing. Now, surprisingly, it didn't bother him at all.

"At the risk of setting a precedent, Doctor, you were correct."

"I knew it!" McCoy shouted gleefully. He turned to get the glasses he'd brought with him, but Kirk's glowing face momentarily distracted him...and Spock's, with so much contentment and love on it.

He forced himself to stop staring and go to the small bench by the side of the path. Coming back, he held out the glasses all ready with a shot of his special "any occasion" brandy. He didn't fail to notice that Spock didn't object to taking his.

McCoy touched Kirk's glass with his. "To love," he said, then turned to Spock and repeated the gesture. "To truth," he toasted and almost dropped his glass when Spock acknowledged the words with a nod and a small smile.

All three emptied their glasses, but only two enjoyed the trail of heat down their throats. McCoy reclaimed his glasses, congratulated them again and turned to leave.

"Bones?" Kirk stopped him. And when he looked back, he saw the captain standing slightly in front of his first officer, his hands behind his back, and McCoy had a strong hunch he'd find a third hand back there, if he cared to look. He gave Kirk an inquiring eyebrow and received a quiet, but heartfelt "thank you" in return.

McCoy smiled back and gave them his surprise. "By the way, this place is yours for the next hour. Don't forget to lock the door." He left them staring after him.

Actually, they've got an hour and a quarter, but why chance it? McCoy grinned at his cleverness in getting the forest for 'medical purposes'. Remembering Kirk's face, he knew he'd been right on target. If he knew his captain, Kirk would go crazy having the Vulcan so near all day and not be^{ing} able to touch him. As for Spock? Well, the Vulcan always had been a fast learner.

And I do know my captain!

It was Spock who finally moved to set the lock. He came back to find his mate holding out his hand to him. He took it, threaded their fingers and they started down the main path, deeper into the man-made forest.

They hadn't gone far when Kirk broke the loving silence. "So many times I've walked through here, wishing you were with me. Dreaming about what we'd do."

Spock didn't say anything, just tightened his hold on Kirk's hand.

"I'd take you to the glade," Kirk said and he veered off to their right, toward the sound of water lazily trickling into a small pond at the far edge of a grass-covered glade. It was the length and width of a large bed. Looking at it, Kirk wondered again how many of his crew had sampled it.

"We'd undress each other," he whispered and followed his words with actions, undoing Spock's coat and slipping it over his shoulders, tossing it out of the way.

Then Kirk pushed the lightweight sweater up, revealing the Vulcan's chest, but Spock had to finish pulling it off himself because the human's hands wouldn't leave the newly bared, hot skin long enough to get it off the rest of the way.

Kirk's lips needed to feel, his tongue needed to taste. He became nearly oblivious to what Spock was doing as he kissed his chest, enjoying the tickling of the dark hairs on his face, running his nose through the thin pelt, laying



his mouth over a nipple. Spock was trying, but having only moderate success, to get Kirk's clothes off during the loving assault. Finally, he took his human by the arms, stood him a foot away and, with a silent admonishment to be good, Spock stripped pants, briefs, boots and socks from him.

Kirk had the presence of mind to wonder how he could do it like that, make it seem as if they all came off as one piece of clothing.

Spock shed his own boots and socks. But there he stopped and Kirk happily took off the rest, then watched his fingers as they closed around the Vulcan penis, so different in color and yet so beautiful. He slid a palm down to cup the softness underneath, then returned to the quickly hardening length. He loved watching the pale green cock fill and grow. The color would deepen a bit, veins would stand out...he could run his finger along them and, if they were full enough, the action would be rewarded with a moan. He tried it now and grinned as the soft sound came to him. But even this wasn't going to change the direction of his fantasy.

"I'd lay you down on the grass."

Spock obediently lay down though a most lovely part of him remained standing, almost beckoning to Kirk as the human stood over his lover, his eyes taking in what was his. Knowing he was also being thoroughly looked over, he felt himself filling, growing bigger, harder, hotter.

"Do you have any idea how incredibly erotic that look of yours is?" Kirk groaned out.

Spock smiled and Kirk saw a smugness behind it that pleased him no end. He spread Spock's long legs, knelt between them and, leaning down, slid his tongue up from the bottom of hot testicles to the already sensitized head, but one lingering kiss on the top was all he allowed himself before laying his own straining shaft next to the jade length and settling both organs comfortably between their bellies.

Spock's hands came down to Kirk's hips and he gently rubbed the fuller, satiny muscles while Kirk lay down on him, careful to use his arms to support his weight. Spock brought his legs up and nestled his ankles on the back of Kirk's knees.

"Now," the captain grinned. "We'd talk about things. Anything, everything. For a while. Just lying here like this."

Spock smiled up at him. "It is difficult to know where your thoughts end and mine begin."

Hazel eyes widened and warmed. "Really?"

"Really. And it has been true for longer than I should admit."

Kirk rewarded the loving words with a kiss. "I wish I could tell you I knew the exact moment I fell for you like the proverbial ton of bricks. But I don't know. And, for so long, I never even allowed myself to think of us like this."

"You came close to it once, that I know of," Spock informed him. "At least you allowed the feeling to surface."

"When?"

"After Vulcan and T'Pring. We had returned to the Bridge...."

Kirk smiled in remembrance. "You escorted me to my chair and stood there like a mother hen, afraid to let me out of your sight."

"I was." Spock quickly, thoroughly and once and for all, squelched the memory of that day. "I am not sure I could have stopped what happened next, even had I wanted to. And I must ask your forgiveness, because what I did, what I allowed to happen was...."

"Unforgivable?"

Spock nodded, his eyes telling Kirk that he still felt guilty about his transgression of so long ago.

"You're forgiven," Kirk said, amazed that the Vulcan needed his absolution. "Now, what was this awful thing you did to me?"

Jim's steadfast belief in me never ceases to amaze me. But it certainly makes confessions easier.

"You were sending quite strongly, I could feel the emotion emanating from you and, not being in total control, my shields were weak and I felt you reaching out to me. I...needed to touch you in some way. To feel you close to me. I opened my mind and your thoughts came to me as if you had spoken them out loud. I allowed myself to read your mind. But only for a moment," he quickly added.

But Kirk had already stopped listening. He was back in time, remembering that odd moment. "You turned away so fast. But I would have sworn you were smiling. And that you'd blushed. I remember wondering if you could have known what I was thinking."

"Do you remember what your thought was?"

"I do," Kirk grinned.

"Tell me now. I want to hear it spoken."

Kirk lowered his body, snuggling his chest against the curly hair under him. He slid his fingers through the silkier hair on the black head and lovingly repeated the words of relief that Spock's mind had heard.

"She didn't win. You're still mine."

Spock's hands took possession of the brown head and he pulled the already opening mouth down to him for a kiss that was more than a simple touching of lips and tongue.

"Would you have been happy with her?" The question was whispered against

warm lips.

Spock's mouth stilled, but he didn't move away. "That is an unnecessary question, Jim. It is totally immaterial."

"Yeah, I know," came a reluctant agreement as Kirk pulled back a couple of inches. "But you should know by now that humans like to know the dumbest things." *But this isn't dumb at all. I really want to know.*

"Very well," Spock sighed. "If it will please you. No, I would not have been happy with her. She was not my Chosen."

"How could she have been? You were only seven at the time."

"That is not what I meant, T'hy'la." The loving softness of the velvet voice, the chocolate eyes gazing intently into his, and the warm hands running lightly over his buttocks brought instant understanding and Kirk felt again the surge of love that left him weak. He snuggled back down and kissed the tiny pulse of life beneath his lips. Then he kissed every inch of skin he could reach from throat to shoulder, where he found himself so comfortable, he stayed. But only for a moment.

When he lifted his head, it was to feel Spock's hand pushing it back down. "Stay there," came the gentle order and he happily complied, his fingers still entwined in the black hair.

Closing his eyes, Spock rested his cheek against the back of Kirk's head, the thick curls brushing his eyelids. He locked his arms around his lover's body and they lay quietly, contentedly, just feeling each other breathe. Spock knew the instant his mate fell asleep.

Several minutes later, Spock had to pull himself from the edge of sleep. His inner clock told him there wasn't much time left and he wanted to end this fantasy as they'd both envisioned it. But he didn't want to move. He never wanted to move. The thought was close to unbearable.

As though they had a mind of their own, his hands moved back to Kirk's head. There was a moment's hesitation, then he entered, slowly, gently so as not to awaken him, and he shared with his lover the fantasy he didn't know if he could ever have told him about.

A long time ago, he'd stepped down to the captain and found him lost in thought. Lost in an erotic daydream, was what Spock had quickly discovered when his eyes had dropped to the obvious bulge between the man's legs. He'd never allowed himself to think about why he'd even looked in the first place.

When you saw me standing there, you tried, unsuccessfully, to casually cover your erection with your hand. I had to leave, I could not stay and chance that you could see my thoughts, my feelings, on my face.

I sat at my station and tried to work. But all I could think about was what you would look like without your clothes. Finally, I gave up and, in my mind, I went back to you.

Once again, I stood before you and placed my hand where yours had been.

Molding you with my fingers, I felt you become hotter and harder. You looked up at me, quietly asking if I had lost my mind. But I knew I had only just found it. Your eyes frantically searched the Bridge, knowing that everyone could see what was happening, but no one was looking. They were all blind to us.

Then your eyes were back on me, with a look in them that made my breath catch in my throat. I had dreamed that one day you would look at me in that way. And only at me. With our eyes locked, your hands covered mine, pressing it harder against you. Suddenly, you pushed me away and loosened your pants and shoved them down. I felt my chest and groin tighten when I saw that you wore nothing beneath. I had seen you nude before, a circumstance that seemed to bother you more than me when I handed you the towel so you could dry yourself. But what you showed me now....

I moved to touch you, my fingers barely grazing the flushed skin. Soft, so soft. I wanted to know if it tasted as soft as it felt. My mouth watered as I took you inside and your quiet groan and gripping hands urged me to do more. I pulled you deeper into me, trying to hold you against my tongue, sucking you, learning of you. But you refused, or were incapable of remaining still. I loosened my grip and discovered there was an equal pleasure in just letting you move in and out of my mouth.

I wanted more. And yet, with only a mild reluctance, I pulled off. I could no longer wait to taste, to feel your kiss. How could I have known that the feelings of that touch would rival that part I had just tasted. I pulled you into my arms and deeper into my mouth.

Seemingly, in the space from one heart beat to the next, I was no longer under my control, but yours. A feeling of such intensity so filled me that I welcomed my surrender to your strength, instinctively knowing that you would now protect me more than ever.

My body strained, pleading to know your touch. Afraid to speak, afraid it would shatter this moment like a delicate piece of crystal, I reached for your hand, to show you what I wanted, but it was already there, searching, finding. You gasped when you wrapped your fingers around me and it was obvious that you were pleased with what you found, for you quickly examined me and groaned again. The relief I felt at this knowledge surprised me. However, I did not linger over it.

I undid my pants, allowing for more room and your other hand slid down my back, inside my briefs, quickly finding the path between my cheeks, rubbing up and down. I felt the rush of blood as it roared through my body and I became so hot I felt I would soon suffocate if I did not get out of my clothes. Pulling away, I grabbed for my blue shirt, but you were even more impatient than I. You pushed my hands away and quickly, efficiently, took over.

So impatient! I had to smile when you would not allow me to return the favor and stripped yourself, making it obvious that I would have been too slow at performing that delightful task.

While you were occupied, a movement from behind you caught my eye and pulled my attention away for a second. I had forgotten where we were, and that we were not alone. The Bridge crew was still here, going on with their work. We were

making love on the Bridge, surrounded by people.

The fact that you seemed to be as oblivious to them as they were to us sent waves of excitement into my stomach and groin, nearly causing a premature release. It took considerable effort to overcome the sensation.

When I opened my eyes, they focused on you. Your naked body was shining from the lights overhead and I experienced a pleasure that was more agony than I have ever known. I wanted this prolonged, to be with you at the end. And yet, conversely, I wanted it ended now, for I could not help but wonder if I would still be sane when the sheer intensity of my feelings had diminished.

You placed our clothes behind you to act as a pillow, then silently asked me to take you again. A pleasure I was not about to forego. I lowered my head and you slid in, filling me, and I tasted, savored, wallowed in the pure uninhibited joy of performing this sexual act upon you. I treasured the fact that I now knew you in this special way.

With a groan, you pulled me up to straddle your thighs, and until this moment, I had never fully appreciated the size of your chair.

You lifted my hips and my erection announced its need as it stretched upward to you. You obediently lowered your head, but I had to stop you. I wanted nothing more than to feel myself inside your mouth, but it would have been all over if I had let you touch me that way. Instead, I moved my hips forward until I could rub my hardness against your stomach and, at the same time, positioned myself so that you were pushing gently at the back of my testicles. Understanding lit your beautiful eyes.

You reached down between us, giving me a quick caress on the way through to your own erection. I felt you stroking yourself, then you nudged me gently. Slowly, I sat down on you, feeling your slick hardness separating me. There was a moment of pain, but I erased it and gladly welcomed you into my body, as I had so long ago welcomed you into my life.

My eyes closed in a last desperate attempt to control, to stretch out this moment that was so beautiful, so...perfect. I felt your hand on the back of my head as you pulled me to you and then your lips were there, with your tongue opening mine, seeking entrance. I gave it, eager to be taken. And you did not disappoint me. The hard thrusts of your tongue quickly matched the deeply penetrating thrusts of your body as you slid in and out of me. The hand behind my head fell to join the one already cupping my buttocks, positioning me, guiding, helping, controlling.

After what seemed like only a moment, you separated our bodies just enough to get a hand wrapped around me. The feel of the hot, gripping strength of your fingers, the thumb rubbing, squeezing my begging organ on its way up to the unbearably sensitive head was more than enough. I do not know if I made any sound, but I did have enough presence of mind left to feel you smiling through our kiss as I erupted all over your hand and stomach.

Though still in control of this incomprehensible joy, I felt you begin your own. With groans filling my mouth and pulsating bursts filling my body, you gave me what I had so longed for. At last, you truly belonged to me. And I to

you. As we were meant to be. And should have been for the first.

All too soon, I felt a wetness that made me think you were slipping out, leaving me. I tightened my muscles around you, wanting to keep you within me forever. But you were already pushing me down more fully onto your lap so that you would be held in place by the weight of my body.

With a lovingly smug grin, you began to nibble at my lips, my jaw and down my throat. I trembled and chills raced down my spine when your lips touched my ear for the first time. When your tongue slowly outlined its curves, and your breath touched me in whispers, I learned just how sensitive my ears actually were. I wanted you again. With such a need to possess and to be possessed that it bordered on desperation.

I recognized it, but I could not conquer, nor even lessen the emotion. I do not believe I wanted to. I gave you everything and, in return, you completed me.

Holding you tightly to me, I whispered my words of love.

"My Vulcan's a bit rusty," you breathed into my ear, sending shudders through my sensitized body. "I sure hope that translates into I love you."

Before I could tell you it did, you moved your hand, the one still holding me, and caressed the slick smoothness of your stomach with my cockhead. I could not hold back a moan of pleasure.

"You're as starved for me as I am for you. Aren't you?"

I could only manage a nod of agreement because your lips were back on mine and your body was once again moving within me. You took me, yet at the same time, gave me possession.

[] [] [] [] []

Kirk stirred and stretched his arms above Spock's head. "Mmmmm.... Oh, Spock, I've just had the most wonderful...." The squishy feeling between their bellies began to register and, when he lifted his head and opened his eyes, he saw a very satisfied look on his lover's face. "...dream?"

Spock's slow smile gave him away. "I did not want to move. Even to make love, which we both wanted. Do you mind?"

"What you did? Hell no! It was fantastic."

"No, that I entered your mind without permission."

Kirk was back on his elbows. Intimidation needed distance. "What is it going to take for you to understand? I love you and I love knowing you can be inside of me whenever and wherever you want. With your beautiful mind and your beautiful cock. Now, will you accept that and quit protecting my privacy? I don't have a damn thing to hide from you." The stern lips broke their rigidity. "Well, not much anyway."

Spock gave in with good grace and a twinkle in his brown eyes.
"I shall endeavor to do better in the future."

"I'm glad that's finally settled." Kirk sighed as he leaned down again to rain soft kisses over the glowing face. "I could stay with you like this forever."

The words made Spock remember something from long ago. "Do you remember when Sargon promised Thalessa that they would be together forever? And I told you that I did not understand?"

"Uh huh."

"You said that maybe one day someone would be able to explain it to me."

He knew exactly what Spock was trying to say and a grin spread across his face. "How'd I do?"

Spock grinned back. "The explanation has been most satisfactory."

"Glad to be of service." Kirk started to kiss him, but as he moved, he felt the squishy stickiness between their bodies again. "And speaking of service, I guess I'm going to have to move after all." He stood up and then realized what he was looking for. A chuckle brought his eyes down to his Vulcan who was lying with his hands behind his head, obviously waiting for him to solve this little problem.

"If I were stronger and that pool a bit bigger...", Kirk threatened.

But Spock was too lethargic to take up the challenge. He merely lifted his brow. The captain gave up and looked around again. Then he spotted their carelessly piled clothes and picked up his briefs. His smile was roguish as he dipped, then wrung out the sopping material. He kept his back to Spock as he cleaned himself, knowing the clenching of his jaw would alert the Vulcan as to the coldness of the water.

But when he knelt beside Spock with freshly rinsed briefs, he couldn't do it. "This is going to be cold," he warned.

"I had hoped you would show mercy."

Kirk rocked back on his heels. "Hoped? Didn't you know?"

"You have often proved you can be extremely unpredictable."

"I should hope so. Wouldn't want you to get bored," Kirk stated while he tried to warm the material between his hands, but finally he gave up and laid the cold cloth against Spock's skin and quickly washed him, enjoying the handling of the now half-hard shaft as he worked over him.

"We have eight minutes to return to duty and we have not yet eaten," Spock informed him.

"Only in our fantasy," Kirk answered. Then yelped when the body under him came up off the ground to pin him beneath it.

Kirk looked up into laughing eyes. "I can't believe this is happening. That we've happened. Is this true? I'm not dreaming all of this?"

"You are not, because I am not."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I know when I am awake."

Kirk manufactured a frown. "And here I was beginning to think I'd found a touch of the romantic in you."

Spock looked deeply into the warm eyes and their intensity soon had the human smiling.

"As you are mine. Forever," Kirk lovingly repeated the silent words which his heart had heard. "Promise me something?"

"If possible."

"Please, I want this. I have to know that if you should...if anything happens to you, that you won't try to keep me from going with you."

* The black brow actually lowered. "Because I am physically relaxed and more closely attuned to you at the moment, you think I will relent on this? I will not promise such a thing, and you know it. The reason I allowed even this bond was because I considered the risk to be acceptable." The rest of that truth was that he'd badly wanted even this little piece of the mate-bond. "The risk is in which of our minds will be the stronger when death comes, if it does not immediately take us both." But that risk was only a remote possibility because Spock knew his mind well and it would protect Jim even before its own survival.

Kirk was quiet, thinking that over. Then he sighed, knowing he had to give it up. For now, anyway. However, "Mister Spock...."

The Vulcan's lips were moving, the corners uncontrollably turning upward. He knew that tone.

"You can be the most frustrating, annoying, irritating, stubborn...."

Spock's grin was now in full force and Kirk groaned. "Oh, the hell with it. Come here."

That was one order Spock would never disobey. Only he wasn't about to let Kirk know that. There were some things it was best not to put into temptation's way.

Kirk squirmed, lifting his hips in an effort to get closer to one of his favorite places. "If you're interested," he said while enjoying the feel of their groins rubbing together. "I'd just as soon stay here."

"Interest has nothing to do with it." Spock then took Kirk's mouth, but his tongue was in and out before it could be captured. Spock rose quickly to his feet and, reluctantly, Kirk took the offered hand and let himself be pulled up.

Kirk had his shirt on and was about to step into his pants when he stopped and looked at Spock who was already fastening his own pants. "I'm glad we were able to live out our fantasy of making love here. It's a shame we can't do the same with the one on the Bridge."

Spock's head snapped up, his eyes wide, and the combination of horror and delight set the human off.

"Course, I could always clear the Bridge." The captain paused for a moment, as if considering that possibility. "No, that wouldn't really be the same, would it?"

He knew Spock couldn't tell if he was teasing or not and the narrowing of the chocolate eyes undid him. He was laughing so hard that Spock had to finish dressing him.

Considering it prudent not to remind his lover that fucking on the Bridge had been his fantasy, Spock tried to put some decorum back into this conversation. "I feel that your idea of sexual excitement could well be our undoing one day." He wasn't even going to think about where his own could lead them.

"It shouldn't. Not with my logical Vulcan beside me...." Kirk leaned closer and kissed the warmer throat. "Or under me...."

Spock's time sense silently groaned.

"...or over...." The tip of the long nose was next. "Or in," he finished against the Vulcan's very willing mouth.

"Jim...." Spock both cautioned and pleaded while stretching his neck to allow the roaming kisses to continue.

"You are so easy to love," Kirk murmured between kisses. "Why did it take me so long?"

"Did it?" The question was not flippant.

And neither was the answer. "No. I guess I was right there with you, all the time. Wasn't I?"

The Vulcan's embrace and kiss were so soft and tender, so loving, that Kirk's knees threatened to buckle. When Spock released him, the human's face was flushed and his eyes were sparkling with an emotion which needed to be expressed. Spock remained still while Kirk tenderly and completely straightened his ruffled bangs.

Knowing it was now or never, Spock gently, but firmly, told him their time was up, touched his lips to Kirk's forehead one last time and stepped out of the arms still holding him. Kirk sighed and watched the Vulcan as he walked down the path that led in the direction of the door. He started to follow, but caught sight of his wet briefs lying on the ground. He picked them up, wadded them in his hand and took off after his lover.

But the feel of the balled up material and the sight of the straight,

commanding figure was just too much to resist. He pulled his arm back and threw, hitting the tight rear end instead of between the shoulder blades he'd aimed for.

Spock froze for an instant, then turned on his heel and took one deliberate step after another, eyes glued on his target.

Uh oh. "Spock...? Now...um...Spock...?"

The totally expressionless face made the human start to back away with his arms held out in an attempt at protection, but he couldn't, absolutely couldn't force his lips to straighten out and take this seriously. "Haven't you ever had something be so tempting you just couldn't resist?"

"I am experiencing such a moment now, Captain." The tone was very even, precise, the words clipped. He kept coming and Kirk kept moving backward.

"Would it do any good to say I'm sorry? I didn't think so," Kirk muttered when the black head moved once to the right and back again. "Could we talk this over?"

"No."

All this time Spock had been backing Kirk into the glade and now, moving with a swiftness Kirk had long ago learned about the hard way, Spock grabbed the human into his arms and dumped him into the pool.

The resulting splash was a respectable one considering the shallowness of the pond. But before Kirk could register that he was sitting in cold water up to his hips, a hand reached down, gripped his jaw and he was being kissed with an adoring, passionate domination he'd have stayed there forever for.

Spock stepped back out of the pool and surveyed his handiwork while he brushed the water from his boots. Suppressing all evidence of his immense satisfaction at the shining eyes, the flushed face and well-kissed mouth, and where his love was sitting, his demeanor became that of the ship's first officer.

"I shall explain that an urgent matter has required your attention, sir. If you will excuse me."

He strolled off.

As soon as he was safely turned away, his face broke into an expression that McCoy would have given a year's pay to have seen.

There came a rumble from behind him. A sound that was soon roaring, reverberating from the ceiling, seeming to fill the huge room. It did fill Spock's entire being and he lit up inside. And the longer and harder Kirk laughed, the brighter the Vulcan glowed.

"I LOVE YOU!"

The shouted words hit Spock just as he reached the door. Catching them, he added them to his already overstuffed heart before leaving the forest.

"Spock?" came a worried voice. "You look kind of funny. Is anything wrong? Where's Jim?" McCoy had come back to make sure they hadn't lost track of the time.

Spock came out of his happy haze long enough to recognize the blue eyes studying him. "Wrong, Doctor? No, nothing is wrong. In fact..." Spock grinned helplessly, "everything is perfect." And he continued on his way, all but floating down the corridor, leaving a slackjawed man staring after him.

I never thought I'd live long enough to see him look like that. Well, Jim, my boy, seems you haven't lost that magic touch of yours.

He entered the forest and immediately heard an unusual sound coming toward him. In a moment, Admiral James T. Kirk came squishing his way into view, humming, grinning, and swinging something from his right hand. McCoy stood still and let the obviously radiantly happy man come to him.

"Hi, Bones," Kirk jauntily called out as soon as he saw him.

The blue eyes narrowed as McCoy took in the sopping pants and boots, and the piece of black material swaying from Kirk's hand.

That looks like.... "What happened?" he demanded as the captain passed him on his way out the door, still humming, still grinning, still swinging his black briefs.

McCoy ran after him and grabbed his arm. "How'd you get wet?"

"Spock dumped me in the pond," Kirk happily told him. He started laughing again, then took off running down the nearly empty corridor to the lift, remembering in time to cram the briefs safely back into his hand.

McCoy started after him, not knowing if he felt like laughing or crying. On the way back to his office, he did a little of both.

EPILOGUE

"Careful, Jim. I don't know what Scotty and Sulu put in that stuff, but from personal experience, I can tell you it'll bury you for two days."

Kirk stared at his drink, then raised a twinkling set of eyes to his friend. "So, they're at it again, huh? In that case, maybe I better stick to punch this time around. That still of theirs and my stomach never did get along."

"I think that's the safest way to go. You'll notice that I'm going light tonight myself. Ah...don't forget, you don't know anything about the resurrection of their...uh...project."

The captain nodded, set the glass down on the long table behind him and picked up a tall, strawberry colored drink. He took a healthy swallow and

immediately gasped for air, sputtering and coughing. The doctor quickly performed the prescribed emergency technique.

"What the hell is this?" Kirk demanded as soon as he was able to talk.

"It's diluted traouqueet, sir," the ensign manning the bar quickly answered.

"Diluted?"

"That stuff's not bad, Jim, providing you don't try to drink it all at once." McCoy spotted a group of lovely ladies he hadn't said hello to yet and, with a last pat on the captain's back, left him for more interesting company.

"Are you enjoying the party, Captain?"

Kirk swung around to see Uhura smiling up at him. "Yes, 'Huri, very much. But your committee really didn't need to go to all this trouble. A simple get-together with plenty of liquor and food would have been more than enough after the last two months. But I know everyone appreciates everything you did to make this a real party. The live music is a nice touch."

"Thank you. We thought a real blow out was called for, and highly deserved. This was quite a shake-down."

"I've never been on a rougher one."

"Well, I think I'm being paged." Uhura smiled her goodbye and Kirk watched in appreciation as the lovely bottom, encased in a long, flowing skirt, moved away from him. Without conscious thought, his eyes traveled onto another feminine backside, then another, and.... Before many minutes had passed, he'd found he'd covered most of the large rec room, scanning rear ends -- of both sexes.

It was only when his eyes lit upon a particular set of slim hips, covered in close fitting, black pants, that he realized what he'd been doing.

After conducting an extensive observation, it is my expert opinion, Commander Spock, that you've got the nicest ass in the room.

The hazel eyes were so taken with that object that Kirk failed to see the sudden snapping to attention of the Vulcan's head. But there was no way he could miss the abrupt turn around, nor the wide eyes and soaring eyebrows.

Jim?

Kirk chuckled at the incredulous tone of the mind-voice. *Of course it's me. Who else would be talking to you like...this.... Spock?*

Precisely, Jim.

But we're not in a meld. You're not even touching me. You're clear across the room. Why? I mean, I'm not objecting, I love it, but, well, is this normal?

For a fully bonded pair, yes.

The information was given so matter of factly that it took Kirk a few seconds to understand what he'd heard.

You mean...we're bonded? How?

I should have realized that this could happen. It is rare for a Matebond to form on its own, but it can happen, especially when the commitment is as deep and strong as ours. From the extent of the bond now, I estimate that it will be complete in two point eight more weeks. At that time it will be irreversible.

Kirk's eyes fell, his shoulders drooping in disappointment.

You misunderstand, Jim. I will not stop this bond from forming. Indeed, I can do nothing to stop it.

The captain's head snapped up. He saw the slight curve of Spock's lips and at the same time, felt in his mind a full, loving smile. But you said it could still be broken.

Yes, it can, but not by me. Even at this stage a healer would be needed to sever it. Spock was now only half the room away from his mate. I have not forgotten why I would not allow this bond between us in the first place, but, Jim, it does now exist. That is a fact and....

And I know you and facts. Are you...sorry?

They were now standing only inches apart, their eyes so full of each other, they could have been alone.

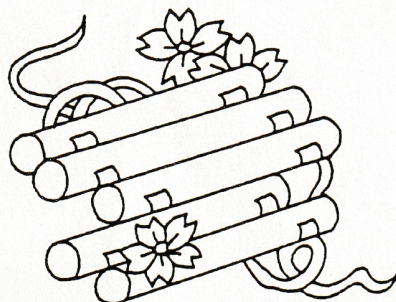
No. I am not. However, I do feel rather foolish after being so adamant about this part of our relationship.

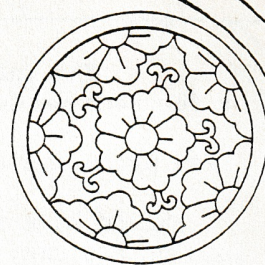
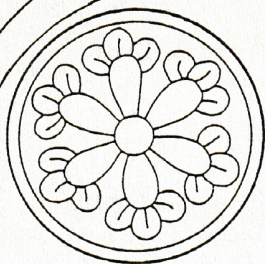
Kirk grinned and, setting his drink down on the nearest table, took the Vulcan's arm and ushered him out of the room. Finding the corridor empty, he slid his hand down to take possession of Spock's as he aimed them toward the lift and their quarters.

"So you were overruled; no need to feel foolish about that."

Spock's grip tightened around Kirk's hand. "Your application of logic can be the most illogical form of precise timing I have ever encountered."

Smiling, the captain stole a moment and rested his cheek on the maroon-clad shoulder next to him. I love you, too.

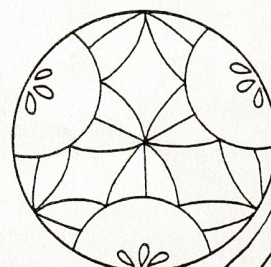
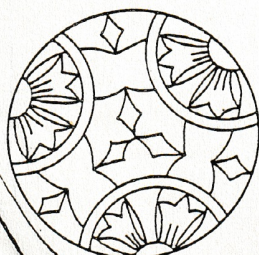




A SUDDEN FREEDOM

If you two could see yourselves.
It's rather a shame the honeymoon can't last forever.
But the beauty of your love will, there's no question of that.
As far as the crew goes, you don't have to worry
about their finding out, and accepting.
You're as easy to read as a viewscreen.
And if you weren't so wrapped up in each other,
you'd see the pleased grins
that have been following you around the ship.
I knew you'd be happy together, but
I had no idea just how much you'd bring to each other.
And I don't think you did either.
I'd bet my shingle, Spock, that you still don't know that
by fully accepting the love between you,
you've set both of you free.
Yourself most of all.
Free to give Jim the one thing he's always wanted
for you, and from you:
that you could just be Yourself.
I did my best to make you see that, too.
Because, like Jim, I knew you wanted and needed to be loved
just like the rest of us.
But, my friend, it never occurred to either of us that, for you,
loving and being loved would mean an entirely new existence.

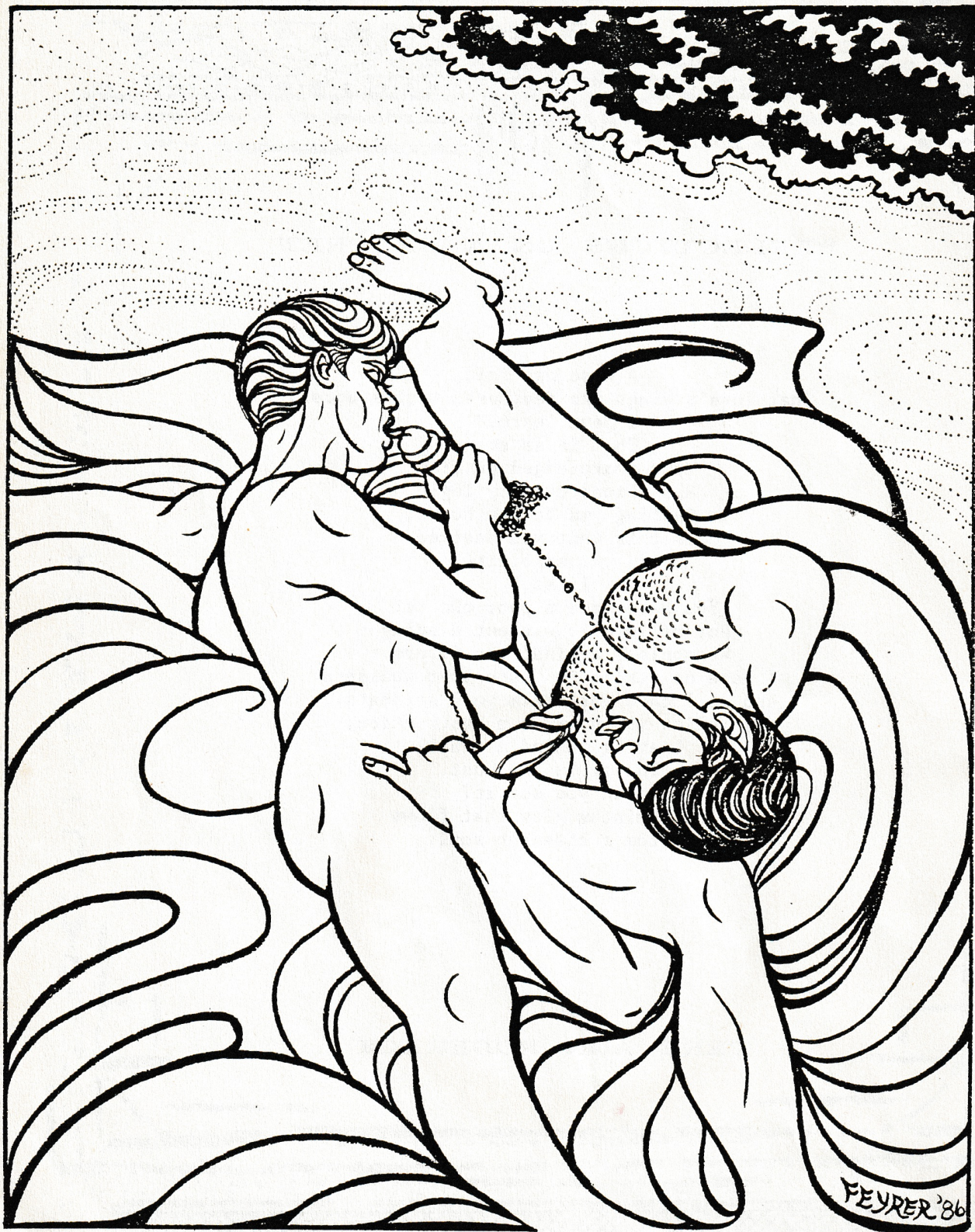
--ROBERTA



REFLECTIONS ON A PROPHET

A wise man said
That love's wings are feathered with swords.
I have learned
That it is so.
Your sharp-edged passion
Has sliced open my logic
Cutting me to the heart.
Is this what you desired?
My vulnerability?
If so,
You have made a poor choice.
For my love is without a sting,
Weaponless against the future.
I have no desire to taste your weakness
And so I dare not claim your strength.
I follow you to my own destruction,
Leaving behind a trail.
There, in the dust,
Can you see it?
The luminous glow that flows
From a bleeding soul.

TERE ANN RODERICK



THE SOON-TO-BE-FAMOUS 'AIDT'

WRITING CONTEST!!!!

Do you see this gorgeous Gayle Feyrer drawing? Do you like it? Doesn't your mind just run off with itself doing wonderfully terrible things just looking at this gorgeous Gayle Feyrer drawing? Well don't just think about it! Write it!!

Okay, here are the rules:

- 1-I know the first thing that comes to mind is a typical 'shore leave scenario'...so, none of those! Figure out another way to get Our Boys on to the beach...or wherever it is they are....
- 2-As far as length goes, let's keep it under novel-size. 5 pages, vignette size, is fine if you can write a \$100.00 winning story in 5 pages. 50-75 is the limit. (Contact the editor under extenuating circumstances -- if your story has to be 85 pages, let me know and I'll let you know!)*
- 3-The usual AIDT rules apply: no undue violence, mayhem, torture, slavery, or death, please!
- 4-The AS I DO THEE staff will be judging the entries. In case of a tie, your friendly editor will be the deciding vote. (In other words, send all bribes to me! -- Just kidding. Really!)
- 5-Winning stories will be printed in AIDT #6.
- 6-Winners will be notified before AIDT #6 is in print.
- 7-Prizes will be awarded at the time of notification.

Please include appropriate size SASE with all submissions.

FIRST PLACE: \$100.00
SECOND PLACE: \$50.00
THIRD PLACE: \$25.00

MKASHEF Enterprises PO Box 368 Poway, California 92064-0005

*That's double-spaced pages, not single-spaced!



Ann
Crouch
Blo